

学園キノ

GAKUEN KINO

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Colour Pages + Prologue

Homework

~A Midnight Deadline~

-Dead Limit-

Summer Homework: Write about your summer break!

Kino, High School Division First-year:

I spent my summer break at my Grandma's house back in my hometown.

I did a lot of things over the summer.

First, I got my motorcycle license as I turned 16. There was a driving school nearby, so I practiced on Grandma's motorcycle before I took the exam. Hermes is an unfair bastard.

I thought I did really well, but I failed the exam because I did a wheelie for about 50 metres.

I didn't understand why they would fail me, but I passed when I tried again more slowly. But I don't like my license picture because I look like I'm trying to ignore an itchy butt.

Otherwise, the rest of my short time was well spent training for all kinds of things with Grandma.



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We took two weeks to practice making beef and potatoes marinated in soy sauce. My final product turned out great, but Grandma fell ill for three days after tasting it.

With the assistance of the Army's Self-Defense Force, I learned to fight against tanks. Grandma was looked down at by one of the men, and she immediately destroyed his T-90 tank. The news reported it as an accident.

My amazing summer break went by so quickly.

When the new term starts, I'll have to go back to fighting demons... well, I guess the demons aren't too bad, but--

I'm going to have to face that pervert _____ Mask again. Every single time a demon appears. I get depressed even thinking about it.

These days I wonder if that guy's the *real* demon I'm fighting against. It doesn't sound too far off the mark.

I'll take care of him next time, no question about it.

The end.

Shizu, High School Division Third-year:

Summer. A season of training.

I started off my summer by composing a new theme song for Samoyed Mask.



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Of course, I already have three fantastic songs, but there's no shame in having too many. One of these days, I'll compile them all and release them in a special album. I'm sure they'll sell like hotcakes.

It will only take me three seconds to compose the music and write the lyrics, but that does not satisfy me in the least. I must always continue to practice my singing and playing.

I practiced swordfighting while practicing guitar. I soon realized that it was incredibly difficult to play the guitar while dancing.

My singing skills are already quite renowned, so I decided to focus on the shouting style this time around. Powerful, stage-rending shouts are what I pursue.

"Come on! One, two! Singing! Thank you!"

I shouted many, many times by myself. Day and night I shouted. I felt myself becoming one with the audience. It was glorious.

Even the local police came to watch my amazing recital. After seeing my katana-swinging performance, they even brought in their friends, the riot police.

I wasn't particularly performing for profit or anything, so I continued to show the audience a once-in-a-lifetime show. By the time I had finished, there was no one left, only finely diced pieces of duralumin on the ground.

I see. So they scattered this because they didn't have any confetti.

My summer vacation is about to come to a peaceful close. However, there is no rest for justice. Justice gets no breaks.



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I will slice and dice from tomorrow on--my first step in bringing justice to the world.

The end.

Inuyama Wanwan Rikutarou, High School Division First-year:

Summer? Who cares?

I will defeat him. I will turn him to scrap. Once the new term starts, I will throw that stupid samurai into the depths of hell.

I will make this term his very last.

But in order to achieve that, I have to train. I have to refine myself even more.

I must maintain discipline! Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline. Clean my desk with discipline. Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline. Damn that buffoonish samurai!

I'll murder him!

No, no. I have to maintain discipline. Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline. Defeat Shizu! I'll turn him into a beehive! Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline.

Maintain discipline. Defeat Shizu.
Disciplinedisciplinedisciplinediscipline. **Dammit!**



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No, no. Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline. Maintain Discipling.
Oh, I made a mistake.

I'm going to start working on a charm. I'll use this purple pen to write 'Defeat Shizu' a thousand times. I'll then burn the note and bury it in the east side of my yard, at which point my wish will come true. I'm sure it will.

Done! Maintain discipline. Maintain discipline.

"Finally! I'm finally finished!"

"Hmm... I'm sure this will suffice. Yeah!"

"Defeat Shizu-I mean, it seems I've finished my homework."

The three shouted at once, at different locations. Immediately afterwards, they shouted in unison:

"I can't hand in this thing!"

"I can't hand in something like this..."

"I don't think I can hand in something like this..."

September 1st, 12:00AM. Once the sun rose, a new, excruciating term would begin.

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**September
Day 9**

A lone girl sat at a curry restaurant.

She was a pretty girl in her mid-teens with short black hair. She was wearing slightly loose beige cargo pants and a black T-shirt.

Printed on the shirt were the words "Permission to Fire" written in white Gothic font. Printed on the back were the words "But don't shoot us - From the Officers <3" written in tiny red Mincho font.

Around the girl's waist was a belt with a holster. The leather holster housed a revolver-type model gun. From the belt hung several small green pouches.

Also hanging from the belt was a small cell phone strap. It had a simple design of green leather and yellow metal.

The store was a small, cozy place that had only recently opened for business. There were five seats at the counter and four 4-person tables. The tidy and sparkling state of the tables were testament to the restaurant's recent opening.

This restaurant, called *Surugaya*, had only opened on the first of August. A part-time worker had been handing out flyers labelled



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"Grand Opening! Raw Eggs are Free all Month!" at the station every morning to promote the store.

The girl was sitting alone at a table, her back to the window. The white lace curtains softened the September sunlight.

It was 2:00PM. It was still hot outside. The sound of cicadas echoed into the air-conditioned restaurant.

"Miss... Kino, was it...? Are you absolutely sure? I hope you know what you're doing."

Standing in front of the girl was the apron-clad store owner. He was the one questioning her.

The owner was a rotund man in his forties who had quit his job to open this restaurant. His name was Mr. Suzuki. He was from Shizuoka. He always had a good-natured smile on his face, but right now he looked a little tense.

"Yes."

The girl named Kino answered tersely as she looked up. From her grip she released three Japanese bills, upon which were printed a portrait of Noguchi Hideyo, and placed them on the table.

"Here you go."

She added 150 yen's worth of coins on top of the bills to hold them down.

"I understand. I will say no more. Which flavour would you like?"

"Pork, please."

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"... Understood. Please wait a moment."

The owner was momentarily dumbstruck. However, he soon nodded and yelled out clearly to the kitchen, audible to the other patrons--

"One challenge menu! 'Mount Fuji' in Pork!"

There was a stir among the other patrons.

The three men who were eating curry in their seats suddenly stopped moving their spoons. A pair of college students still waiting for their meals at a table began whispering to each other.

"Looks like someone's going for it."

"No way... a kid like her?"

Their eyes, wide with shock, wandered onto the menu beside the table. They then scanned the first words written at the very top.

"Challenge Menu!

An Extra-Extra-Extra Large Special Curry, Mount Fuji!

3 Kilograms of Specialty Fried Rice Curry! 2 Kilograms of Roux!
(Available in Chicken, Beef, Seafood, and Vegetable flavours)."

Underneath the words was a photograph of the curry dish named "Mount Fuji".

Curry-flavoured fried rice containing diced meat and egg was heaped upon a platter-sized dish. A huge helping of curry roux



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lined the edges, and melted cheese topped the rice in a way that made it look like the snow that capped Mount Fuji.

It cost 3150 yen with tax. And--

"Limited to one try per customer. Finish it in 20 minutes and it's on the house! You'll receive 3000 yen as prize money. You must not leave even a single grain of rice or spill anything off the plate in order to qualify."

Following the warning were the words,

"When you'd like to take the challenge, please say your name and place 3150 yen on the table. Only those who are ready to pay are worthy to eat!"

"Apparently they've had about 30 challengers so far, but only two people managed to finish it..."

"Yeah. They say the oily fried rice, the meat and the egg, and the huge serving of cheese makes it really tough to finish. And the pork flavour's probably the toughest of them all, considering how much meat goes into the dish... I don't think anyone's managed that one."

"Does that girl know what she's getting herself into?"

The college students whispered to each other as they drew a nervous breath.

Kino herself was calmly looking at the *Fukujinzuke*¹ with her hands on her lap.

¹ A mix of pickled vegetables commonly served with curry.



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From the kitchen echoed the owner's voice, saying things like, "What are you doing? You need to add more rice to the skillet on the left!", and "Put the roux on standby!".

The men eating curry were also on edge. They compared their own plates with the photograph on the menu and frowned at the overwhelming difference.

And then...

"Thanks for waiting! Here's your 'Mount Fuji'!"

The owner personally carried over the terrifying object with both hands. The plate was as wide as the owner's shoulders. The fried rice was stacked higher than the plate was wide, and it was all topped with a thick layer of cheese. The roux splashed, threatening to spill out of the plate, and square pieces of pork lined the flat surfaces.

"What the hell is that...?"

"A-a wedding cake...?!"

The other customers looked at the dish like it was a UFO.

When the owner put the plate onto the table, the table legs squeaked. He then took out a stopwatch from his pocket.

"Are you ready?"

Kino answered calmly.



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"I'd like to ask one thing before I begin. May I have a cup of water, without ice?"

There was already a glass of water on the table, but it was full of ice. The owner cocked his head, but brought over a cup of water. He put it on Kino's right, beside the gigantic plate.

"Thank you very much."

Kino thanked the owner and quietly reached for the spoon. She took hold of it.

"Hm?"

The owner raised an eyebrow.

Normally, people would hold a spoon the same way they held a pen. However, Kino held it with a reverse grip--almost as if she was holding an ice pick. Not only that, the back of the spoon was pointed towards her.

Kino slowly took the spoon and dipped the end in the glass of water she just received.

Sitting in front of the dish, spoon still held in the water, Kino answered.

"I'm ready."

It was a strange pose, one that the owner had never seen before. It was a completely new speed-eating stance.

"..."



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The owner, holding the stopwatch, was captivated by the strange sight that unfolded before him.

'This girl's no ordinary human . She's fought her way through countless bloody dishes in her lifetime', his intuition told him. His palms began sweating. He had never encountered such a formidable foe before. *'She's a monster!'* His brain cried out.

The five customers also looked at Kino, the curry, and the owner. They didn't want to miss this battle, even if their own dishes were to go as cold as ice.

The owner drew a deep breath.

For a single moment, the sound cicadas went silent.

The restaurant was enveloped in stillness.

"Begin!" The owner cried.

"Whew."

Kino let out a sharp breath as she drew the spoon from the glass of water.

A single drop of water fell from the spoon, and left ripples on the surface of the water.

And before the first wave had reached the edge of the cup--

Kino began eating.

And she finished it all. Quick as always.



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Having filled her belly and found herself some extra spending money, Kino was taking a carefree walk through the park.

"That was delicious! I'm 100% satisfied!"

The holster at her side shook.

It was a large park that was between the curry restaurant and the school, surrounded by newly-built apartment buildings. Despite the heat, children laughed energetically as they ran around playing.

Kino was wearing a hat to avoid the searing sunlight.

It was a blue baseball cap. Over the front were the words "Panjandrum out of control! Explosion at the waterside!" written in red italics. Where do they sell hats like this? I don't know. If you want one, you should make it yourself.

Kino looked up at the fluffy white clouds in the sky and spoke.

"It's not fair that I only get to try once. Right, Hermes?"

"They'll go out of business if they let you do that, Kino." said a young boy's voice from just beside Kino. However, all of the children were at a distance from her. Kino was definitely walking alone.

Kino, completely unsurprised by the disembodied voice, answered Hermes.

"Then maybe that's just their destiny."



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"You're so cruel." Hermes answered, dumbfounded. Shockingly enough, this voice was coming from the cell phone strap hanging from Kino's belt. Hermes was the cell phone strap.

"They're serving dumplings for dinner today. The dorm's dumpling are the best, and there's unlimited refills." said Kino.

"Only you could think about food after eating all that curry, Kino." Hermes was dumfounded.

Kino, who lived at the school dorms, normally ate all three meals at the school cafeteria. However, meals on weekends had to be ordered beforehand, to accommodate students who were going out for the day. So Kino would not get any lunch if she did not sign up by the morning of the day. Of course, she didn't sign up today because of the Challenge Menu.

Kino normally had dinner at the cafeteria between 6:00PM and 7:30PM. As a side note, she could get unlimited refills of, rice, miso soup, and salted vegetables.

"That's a completely different matter. Besides, I already paid for my meal, so it'd be a waste not to eat it, right? The word 'waste' is famous around the world, you know, just like 'Tsunami'."

"That so?"

A camera was looking at the food-loving Kino (and Hermes) from afar.

It was an apartment near the park, in a room that Kino couldn't see very well because of the sunlight. A suspicious lens was



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sticking out from between the dark curtains and was pointed at Kino.

The room was devoid of furniture. In the room was an expensive-looking (1000000 yen+) telescopic lens resembling a bazooka, mounted on a tripod. Beside it was attached a popular single lens reflex digital camera.

A person was looking into the camera's viewfinder in this dark room. From the curvy figure they showed in their dark clothing, she was most likely a woman.

"Hm... so that's her, huh? The lone Warrior of Justice..."

The mumbling voice was definitely that of a young woman.

She looked at Kino through the viewfinder with her right eye and pressed the switch with the remote she was holding.

"Kino, stop moving for a second. Turn 72 degrees to your left, look up 14 degrees, smile, and hold up a 'V'." Hermes said suddenly.

"Why?"

"Just do it."

Kino did as she was told, smiled, and held up a 'V'.

"Like this?"

"Say cheese!"



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The camera snapped a photo.

The preview screen showed a great photo of a smiling Kino looking directly at the camera. Charm practically oozed out of the picture.

"She's pretty good..."

The mystery woman muttered, and smiled.

The curtains closed silently.

"You can stop now, Kino."

Kino put her hand down and continued walking. She then asked Hermes the obvious question.

"What was that all about, Hermes?"

"It's a secret. Looks like things are going to get lively around here."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's a secret."

The model gun-toting, food-loving high school student Kino, who transforms into a mysterious Warrior of Justice, and the talking cell phone strap-slash-mascot, Hermes. This is their gunsmoke-filled tale.



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Chapter 4: *Chako's Explosive Story* -Tea Breaks!- (Part 1)

The next day. It was a Monday morning.

Kino energetically walked to school under the cherry trees.

Like the other female students, she wore a sailor-style summer uniform. She carried over her shoulder a light beige bag, and wore a belt from which hung several pouches and a holster. Hermes as well.

Around Kino were other students from this academy that housed both a junior high and a high school division. For reference, Kino is a fourth year--a first-year high school student.

Girls' uniforms were green sailor uniforms with red ties. For boys, they had a choice of either a white standing-collar uniform or grey pants and white dress shirt with a tie emblazoned with the school crest.

The road to school was a steep uphill climb, but Kino was smiling ear to ear.

"You look happy today, Kino. Did something happen?" Hermes asked quietly.

Kino's answer was practically dripping with delight.

"Of course I'm happy! We haven't had a single demon attack since the beginning of term. Oh~ I never thought normal student life could be so great."



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"Don't let your guard down."

"I wish I could just have a normal school life like this... I think Hermes' voice is getting more and more distant. Oh? Now he's just a normal cell phone strap~"

"You're cruel, Kino. Anyway, the battles are only going to get more difficult this term, so don't get too lazy about training and try to be resolute."

"Peace is the best!"

"Peace and freedom don't come cheap, you know. You need drive and resolve to~"

"Lalala! I can't hear you!"

"Not this again."

Kino and Hermes walked past the gates and into the school grounds.

The school was completely repaired over the summer break.

Places damaged by stray bullets and katanas had been restored to their former glory, and all windows had been replaced with bulletproof ones to prevent further damage.

The emergency shutters had also been replaced to a sturdier model, one that was for protection against explosions rather than fires. Dotted along the hallways were emergency buttons labelled "Press in case of Demon Attack!".



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Public Service Announcements had also been posted on the walls of classrooms and hallways.

"Friends don't let friends fall to demonic temptation."

"Only you can prevent demonic rampages."

"When you study ALONE, you study with evil!"

"It's lunchtime. Do you know where your classmates are?"

"You can make a difference. Take a bite out of evil!"

"This is your brain on evil. Any questions?"

The school calendar had been altered this term so as to account for classes missed because of demon attacks, and exam marking guidelines were updated with detailed rules on demon-interrupted exams.

Looks like this school's gotten completely used to these demons.

Morning classes began.

Everyone had to switch seats because it was a new term. Kino found herself sitting in the back row, near the aisle.

This was a popular seat during the summer because the window seats, for all their wonderful views, were much too hot. Kino was located right next to the door, a perfect place for her to run out from as soon as lunchtime began.



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Inuyama Wanwan Rikutarou, the prettyboy with long white hair who had annoyingly followed Kino around everywhere, was seated at the centre in the front row. Students considered this the worst seat in the classroom due to the proximity to the teacher making it a prime spot to have spit raining over your face.

Of course, this was one of the reasons Kino had been so cheerful recently--she could escape before he had a chance to talk to her after class.

And it was upon this peaceful classroom--

During second period--

That 'She' descended upon them.

"Let's see here... Your English teacher, Yamada-sensei, had to return to his hometown and take over the family business because his father has suddenly collapsed."

It was time for English class. The elderly homeroom teacher arrived a little after class started to drop this bomb of an announcement upon the unsuspecting students.

The English teacher, Mr. Yamada Tarou (Age 43, married, 1 daughter in elementary school), had wandered the world as a young man and picked up the language. He would often amuse the class by going on tangents that had nothing to do with the lesson. He had been teaching until just last Friday. It was very sudden.

Understandably, everyone peppered the teacher with questions like "what family business?" and "isn't this a bit sudden?".



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"I don't know any specifics. We'd only just been contacted after the morning exercises..."

It seemed that the homeroom teacher was clueless.

After the students held a short period of mourning for Yamada-sensei, the homeroom teacher continued.

"As for today's lesson-"

"Do we have a study period?" Someone asked hopefully. The homeroom teacher, however, shook his head.

"Let me introduce your new teacher."

"What?!"

The students fell into confusion. How could they get a replacement so quickly?

The homeroom teacher ignored this confusion.

"Well then, please come in."

The door slid open.

And a woman entered the classroom.

The boys' attention was focused instantly.

The girls (except Kino) looked slightly upset.



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The new arrival to the classroom was a woman in her early twenties, dressed in a blue business suit with a miniskirt.

She was a woman of extraordinary beauty.

With her long, slender frame, attractive features, emerald-green eyes, and short white hair, the woman gave off an unusual vibe, like she was from another world entirely.

She slowly made her way to the front of the class and stood beside the homeroom teacher.

"If you could please introduce yourself."

The woman nodded and began writing her name on the blackboard.

Once she finished, she turned around and introduced herself in a clear, beautiful, and somewhat delicate voice. In Japanese, obviously.

"Nice to meet you, class. My name is Kuroshima Chako."²

Kuroshima Chako.

Kuroshima Chako.

Kuroshima Chako.

² Chako-sensei is based on Ti from Kino's Journey, who begins travelling with Shizu after volume 8. Her last name, *Kuroshima*, meaning "black island", refers to the fact that she was originally from what was described as one such structure. The way she treats Inuyama is basically what she does all the time to Riku the dog in Kino's Journey. More on her in part two.



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Chako-sensei, the woman with the strangely imposing name, smiled at the class.

"I'll be your English teacher from today on. I hope we all get along." she said, and bowed deeply.

The students also bowed, and the moment they raised their heads-

"OH!" Chako-sensei shouted, almost loud enough to shatter the bulletproof windows, and surprising the entire class. The homeroom teacher's eyes were the size of dinner plates and he looked like he was about to die of a heart attack.

"How cute! You're so adorable!"

Chako-sensei ran over behind the white-haired Inuyama.

"I'm going to give you a big hug!"

She then embraced Inuyama's head from behind.

"Ack!"

The appalled Inuyama struggled as hard as he could to release himself from the teacher's arms.

"Ohhh! You're just too cute!"

Chako-sensei's grip, however, was just too powerful for Inuyama to escape from. She rubbed her chin against the top of his head.

"So soft! And fluffy!"



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And as the entire class (sans Kino) watched in shock, Chako-sensei lovingly shook Inuyama.

"Please stop it!" Inuyama yelled. He then asked, "why are you doing this?"

Chako-sensei stopped shaking Inuyama and placed her chin on his head. She then answered his question.

"Well... I just got an urge. You're so adorable, I couldn't help myself. But I get a really nostalgic feeling when I'm standing like this. I wonder why?"

She sounded happy.

"Who cares?" Inuyama retorted, and Chako-sensei returned to mercilessly shaking Inuyama and rubbing his face.

"Ohhh! So adorable! So warm!"

"Ack! Please, stop! Kuroshima-sensei! Your chest is about to-"

"It's not touching you, so it's fine."

"Eeeeek! Someone! Help me!" Inuyama screamed.

"Looks like you're getting along just fine. If you'll excuse me, then..." the homeroom teacher left, muttering something about being jealous.

"Let's start today's lesson. Which page should we start with? 43? Sounds good! Let's get started!" Chako-sensei said with a clear



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voice, and read the English phrases on the textbook with perfect pronunciation.

"'I'm from Moq Moq Village'."

She then explained in Japanese.

"This phrase means, 'I'm from Moq Moq Village'. Adding 'from' to the verb 'be' means that the subject is from that location. I have no idea where Moq Moq Village might be, but I guess it exists somewhere. Hm... maybe around Ehime Prefecture?"

I apologize to anyone from Ehime Prefecture. There's no particular meaning behind the choice of location.

Chako-sensei spoke again in English.

"Okay, everyone. Repeat after me! 'I'm from Moq Moq Village'."

All the students repeated after her, except for Inuyama.

"Kuroshima-sensei! Why are you teaching class on top of my head?!" Inuyama asked Chako-sensei, who was teaching with her chin resting on top of Inuyama's head.

The teacher's podium had been pushed aside, and Inuyama's desk had done a 180. He was taking class while facing the other students, with a teacher resting on his head.

Chako-sensei ignored Inuyama's protests and asked the students for the English word for "Myna bird". Inuyama was on the verge of exploding with rage.

"Kuroshima-sensei! Please answer me!"



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"Be quiet. Take a seat."

"I'm already sitting down!"

"Okay, everyone. Turn to the next page."

"Kuroshima-sensei! Listen--"

"Be quiet! Take this!"

Chako-sensei mercilessly attacked Inuyama's temples with her right fist.

"Eek!"

Inuyama screamed pitifully. Chako-sensei continued the lesson, still hugging his head.

Inuyama was only released when the bell rang to signal the end of second period.

"That was wonderful! I'll see you all again later!"

And as soon as Chako-sensei disappeared with these words--

"..."

Inuyama was sprawled out over his desk, out of energy and completely unmoving.

Kino took in this sight and muttered, "What a wonderful teacher.". Chako-sensei had earned Kino's respect. She could now enjoy a



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relaxing moment in the classroom without being bothered by Inuyama.

And during this short break--

Rumours of the beautiful, fun, and talkative new teacher spread throughout the school, along with her new chin-rest, Inuyama Wanwan Rikutarou.

Some time later, fourth period began.

One male student was sitting in his seat in the second-year junior high class on the first floor.

This nondescript boy sitting at the back only half-listened to the middle-aged teacher's tedious lecture on Japanese history.

"..."

With elbows rested on his desk and his chin sitting on his knuckles-

'Oh... the Soviet Air Force would suddenly arrive at the school, kill all the teachers and the adults, and try to take over Japan... it'd be so cool if me and my classmates escaped into the mountains together and banded together to form a resistance group...'

He was daydreaming.

The teacher was talking about the Onin War, but the boy's head was lost in thoughts like, *'Or maybe, I wake up one day and find myself summoned to a future world inhabited only by cats. Then*



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I'd teach stuff to the talking cats, but stuff happens and I end up adventuring...'

Other thoughts included--

'The icy and beautiful Student Council President who is secretly working at a maid cafe suddenly makes an announcement over the PA, guerrilla-style, and denounces evil textbook companies in front of the entire school... but that's never gonna happen... our Student Council President is a guy, and he looks like a thug so everyone calls him "Captain" instead of "President"...'

He was lost in his own little world.

Being quite the daydreamer, this particularly imaginative boy could warp into his own fantasies within three seconds, whether he was in class or elsewhere. There he could become a heroic protagonist, or bring in his friends into a wonderful made-up world.

His eyelids became heavier as he fell into these thoughts.

Actually, he hadn't slept very well last night. Late-night anime are not good for your health, after all. But he watched them anyway. He had wanted to discuss the episode on the internet as soon as it ended.

He reminded himself that he would probably get in trouble if he slept in class, and looked up. He saw a PSA posted high up on the blackboard--"Say no to evil! -a message from Student Council President Ishihara".

'That's right... I can't fall for temptation and turn into a demon... I want to be a hero, anyway... come to think of it, wouldn't it be



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awesome is a half-alien half-human girl would transfer into class...?' he thought, and he felt sleepy again.

The teacher was talking about Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's *Rashomon*. His voice, however, became more and more distant.

"Whoa!"

When he came to, the boy was in an empty classroom.

"Huh? What's going on?"

He turned his head to look around, but there was nothing but empty desks and chairs. He sat alone in this silent classroom.

"No way..."

Worrying that he'd been sleeping until school ended, he quickly looked up at the clock above the blackboard. The clock, he noticed, had seven hands. They were all spinning at different speeds.

"W-what's happening?" He mumbled, and staggered to his feet. Suddenly--

"I've found you... my hero..."

A girl's disembodied voice echoed through the classroom. It was a delicate voice, like the sound of a small songbird.

At that very moment, the blackboard turned blue. The ocean-blue board reflected the boy and the empty classroom.

"What... is this...?"



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The blue surface ahead of the confused boy was broken by ripples. And a small shadow rose from the depths of this ocean.

What could this be? A beautiful girl with blue hair, dressed in colourful clothing and wearing hair decorations, who couldn't possibly be human, rose from the blue blackboard.

Her upper body rose above the surface. She opened her eyes. The right eye was light yellow, and the left was deep purple.

The boy stood up. There was a 90 degree difference between them.

"Who... are you?" He asked.

The girl smiled serenely and answered.

"I have no name. But you may call me 'Bell'. I am the bell who will toll to awaken and summon the hero from another world--"

"'Bell'? I'm... a hero?"

"Yes. The fact that you can hear my voice--that is proof that you are the hero. Please save us--please save our world."

"But... how..."

"Take my hand and answer 'yes'. Then the contract will be complete. Let us depart on a journey together..."

He slowly approached the girl and reached for her outstretched hand.

Their hands touched. Her hand was warm in his.



GAKUEN KINO

"You would... come with me...?" The girl asked, tears welling up in her eyes.

'Oh, I get it! This is a dream!' the boy realized. He had fallen asleep in class and this was all a dream. He was correct.

They say that only about one in ten people can recognize when they are in a dream. They call this state 'lucid dreaming'.

Lucid dreamers have a certain level of freedom in their dreams. They can do things that would normally be impossible in real life--like flying into the air.

The boy nodded vigorously.

"Yeah! Let's go!"

He was a bit of a coward in real life, but anything was possible in dreams.

The next moment, he had kicked off the floor and was standing on the same surface as Bell. The ceiling was straight ahead of him.

His feet began sinking into the blackboard. The lockers at the back of the classroom disappeared above him.

"Thank you... my hero. Please order me to do as you wish."

"...!"

As she spoke, she suddenly placed her lips on his with a smile.

'What a wonderful dream...'



VOLUME 02

He slowly sank into the blackboard, into the endlessly blue seas.
To protect another world in his dreams.

Crash!

The boy stood up suddenly, pushing his chair off balance and onto the floor. The teacher was shocked out of his lecture on the end of the Muromachi Period.

The boy staggered towards the door, exiting into the hallway.

"W-what are you doing?"

The teacher asked, and the boy slowly turned his dead fish-like eyes, and answered in a deep voice straight out of the depths of hell--his stomach hurt and he was going to the washroom.

"I see... you may leave." The teacher answered, and the boy disappeared into the halls.

The door shut, and his silhouette through the bulletproof glass was all that was visible of him. His form then began morphing monstrously.

The girl sitting beside the hall screamed.

It was 40 seconds later that the demon alarm rang throughout the school.



GAKUEN KINO

This doesn't have much to do with the story, but it was four days later that a PSA saying, "Evil lurks around every corner... even in your dreams!" was posted on the halls.

"Warning. A demon has been sighted on school grounds. All students and staff must exit the building in a calm and orderly fashion. The demon is rampaging on the third floor staircase in the west wing. Please exit through the east wing staircases or the new school building. This is not a drill. I repeat, a demon has been sighted. All students-

The calm announcement came over the PA after the loud alarm had gone off. Looks like the announcement team's gotten completely used to these demons.

Kino and Inuyama were in the music room at the time for music class.

"Oh!"

Kino, who had been listening to the quintessential Baroque piece, Canon in D, looked up and frowned.

"It's been a while. Looks like this is the first one this term." Hermes muttered quietly.

Kino nodded with a scowl and reached for the model gun at her waist.

Meanwhile, Inuyama, having finally recovered from the shock of Chako-sensei, smiled in a way that made it look like he was baring his fangs.



VOLUME 02

"Dammit, this is all that bastard's fault... Defeat Shizu... Hahaha... Today I will crush you..."

"Everyone evacuate! Make two lines and exit calmly!"

The teacher expertly herded the calm students out of the class.

"Oh no! This is terrible. We have to get away." said Kino, pretending to be extremely panicked and confusingly wandering the music room.

She then took the opportunity to hide away in one of the practice rooms.

Everyone left the classroom, including Inuyama.

When the alarm went off, Chako-sensei was in a third-year high school class.

She had discovered a particularly excellent student and took the opportunity to have him explain everything to the class.

This student had handsome features and slightly long black hair. He wore a white school uniform and had a katana beside him. As a side note, there is only one student in this school who carries around a katana. One student is enough.

When the alarm went off--

This student who had been unhesitatingly explaining the subjunctive mood as he stood at his seat--



GAKUEN KINO

"It's here."

This student named Shizu scowled and raised his head.

"Hm? What's this? A false alarm?"

Chako-sensei, who had been standing at the podium naively looked up at the speakers above the blackboard.

However, for a single moment when her face was turned away from the students, she narrowed her green eyes and smiled belligerently.

"It seems a demon had appeared. Everyone should calmly escape according to procedure." Shizu instructed his classmates. The students, too used to this by now, quietly made their way out.

"You should escape as well, Kuroshima-sensei."

The moment Shizu said this, the school shook with a sudden explosive sound. It seemed the demon was rampaging somewhere, perhaps even breathing fire.

Of course, this school was completely used to this. There was no need to panic. However--

"Kyaaaa! Somebody help me!"

Chako-sensei emitted a high-frequency scream and ran for her life, abandoning the students she was supposed to guide. She opened the door, ran into the halls, and fled animatedly with a trail of dust in her wake. She disappeared through the emergency staircase. Her legs must be extra-powerful.

VOLUME 02



The confused students concluded that her unusual behaviour was due to having just arrived at this school, and coolly continued evacuating.

Shizu quietly snuck away from the line of escaping students. He walked through the deserted halls, suddenly carrying a boston bag emblazoned with the logo of an athletics company.

He walked in the direction of the rampaging demon.

"Now I shall show you the radiance of justice." he muttered. Maybe he had actually meant to say 'Now I shall show you the pinnacle of perversion'. That's right, that must be it.

With his left hand, Shizu drew the katana, sheath and all, and tossed the boston bag into the air.

He then began taking off his clothes. Instant stripping. Nude. Bare. Naked. Birthday suit. Butt. Elephant.

The walking diagram of perfect musculature, the Exposure Man Shizu, took two steps in the hall, barefoot.

And the next moment, he was fully clothed. He had instantly put on the clothes that had been falling from the bag that he had tossed into the air.

The white standing-collar uniform had been switched out for the battle-use white standing-collar uniform. He wore a white cape and a white mask, and an apple was balanced on the top of his head. Once he slowly placed the katana back at his side, the transformation would be complete.



GAKUEN KINO

His pearly whites sparkled and a dove flew past him. In slow motion, at that.

"Another day of action!" said Samoyed Mask, smiling. However--

He had yet to know of the terror that would soon be upon him.

Staff and students gathered on the school grounds, a good distance away from the school building. The grounds were the designated evacuation area because of its proximity to the rear entrance. Thanks to the two drills that had been conducted earlier this term, the evacuations went very smoothly.

The centre of the school grounds was now populated by evacuated students celebrating interrupted classes.

Suddenly, the sound of heavy engines assaulted them.

The students turned their attention to the source of the noise at the school gates.

They were moving trucks.

A trio of moving trucks, stamped with the logo of a moving company, loudly made their way into the middle of the school grounds, leaving tire tracks in their wake. A cloud of dust rose up as they came to a stop.

"What the...?"

"What is that?"



VOLUME 02

"Movers?"

The people that exited these trucks amidst the gazes of the shocked students were, surprisingly enough, soldiers.

It was still very hot out, but the soldiers were wearing black overall combat suits. They wore military boots and bulletproof vests loaded with ammunition, grenades, and other equipment. They also wore helmets with tinted guards that concealed their faces.

They had holsters on their thighs that sheathed coastguard-use Smith & Wesson Model 5906 9mm semi-automatic pistols. On the other thigh was an ammunitions pouch.

They also had slung over their shoulders Howa Type 89 5.56mm rifles, equipped with dot sights manufactured by Tasco Japan. Of course, they weren't air guns (It's particularly complicated these days because the Self-Defense Force uses air guns in drills and exercises). The bipod had been removed in order to minimize weight.

These masked soldiers quickly disembarked from the trucks and lined up in the middle of the school grounds. There were twelve of them altogether.

"Who are those people...? They can't be police, could they?"

"I don't know... Do you know anything about this, sensei?"

"No, not a thing, I'm afraid."

The students murmured among themselves. These mysterious men that not even the teachers knew anything about merely stood in line, as if waiting for something.



GAKUEN KINO

A strong wind suddenly swept through the field.

The students grimaced as dust flew into their faces. Just as they were beginning to spit out the dirt from their mouths, however--

"Look! Someone's coming out of the school!" someone shouted. Everyone turned to look at the entrance, wondering if it was the demon.

They could make out a humanoid figure in the duststorm.

All of a sudden, the soldiers saluted the figure in unison.

The emerging figure was that of a woman.

Like the other soldiers, she wore a black combat suit. Her face was covered by sunglasses, but it was easy to tell that she was quite the beauty. The short hair sticking out from under her black beret was white as snow.

She seems kind of familiar, but who...? This is a mystery.

The woman saluted sharply and stood in front of the soldiers.

And--

"Good day, Chosen Warriors! Now we shall destroy the demon and restore peace to the school! How can we leave this job to some unknown Warrior of Justice? Prove to the country that we are not a waste of taxpayer money!"

She began a speech with her clear, beautiful, and somewhat delicate voice.

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She continued.

"Men! We like but only one hero!"

And--

"On the plains! On the highways! In the trenches! In the fields!
Why?!"

Her lecture continued. And finally,

"We cannot leave them to fire endlessly." she finished her speech.

"Men! Prepare to charge!" She ordered.

The soldiers loaded their rifles in unison. The sound of clicking metal rang across the grounds.

As the students looked on in a daze--

"Oh! Those people are--!" one young man spoke up.

"You know who they are?!" The students turned their attention towards him. The young man nodded.

"Yeah. I read about them in a military magazine not too long ago!
Those people are the Anti-Demon Corps, recently mobilized by the Japanese Government!"

"N-no way!" x3



GAKUEN KINO

"The government recruited talented people from the Self-Defense Force and the police to create a special division to combat the demonic menace. It's them!"

This particular student was unusually knowledgeable.

Isn't there one in every class? Someone who's surprisingly well-read on firearms and military knowledge. It's the kind of person who is normally quiet, but can go on at length, usually to a creepy degree, when the teacher starts talking about anything military-related. For example, a student who could instantly answer the question "Which weapons were first deployed in the First World War?" with "Poison gas, tanks, airplanes!". There was always one in my class. It was me.

The military otaku's explanations continued.

"This organization's official name is "Kill, Attack, Enemy, React, Element!"

This was the name of the organization, whether or not you liked the astoundingly bad English.

"You put these words together to get the initials 'KAERE'!"

Excitement began sweeping through the crowd of students.

If such an elite organization was now in charge of defending the school, there would be no more need to fear demons. They wouldn't be left having to wait for the food-loving, trigger-happy, always-tardy Warrior of Justice every time a demon showed up.



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"All right!" "Get 'em!" "We've been waiting for you!" The students shouted, renewed with hope. Their words eventually developed into a rallying cry, complete with rhythmic clapping.

"'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'! 'KAERE'!"

It sounded like the students were protesting against something, but the soldiers paid it no mind.³

"Charge! Follow my lead!"

The soldiers followed the beautiful, gun-toting commander into the school building.

Marvel at their perfect synchronization! Their textbook coverage that eliminates each and every blind spot!

The twelve soldiers disappeared into the school building.

Gulp.

As soon as the staff and the students swallowed--

"Aaahhh!" "Whoa!" "Gahhhhh!" "Ack!" "Nooo!" "Uaaaagh!"
"Ungahhh!"

Everyone but the commander was tossed through the windows by the demon, landing on the grounds and leaving a cloud of dust.

³ The word *kaere* means "go back" or "leave". So it sounds like the students are telling KAERE to get out of their school.



GAKUEN KINO

"Owww!" "Mommy!" "Help!" "I'm going home!" "MEDIC!"

As they watched the weeping soldiers, the students sighed and realized that these people were definitely not the heroes of this story.

Kino had been quietly watching the one-sided demolishing of KAERE from the music room window.

"Darn. And here I was, hoping they'd be able to do something." Kino sighed.

"It's a lonely job, being a hero." Hermes said, as if none of this was his business.

"Anyway, let's finish this off before Pervert Mask gets here."

Kino drew the model gun from the holster on her right. She raised it into the air and released the hammer with her thumb. She stood with her feet apart, twisted her hips, leaned back slightly, and elegantly bent her left arm. She was the spitting image of the infamous villain Hans Gruber from *Die Hard*, played by Alan Rickman! Of course, he's better known now as Professor Snape.

It was now time for the transformation phrase.

"From my cold! Dead! Hands!" Kino shouted confidently.

If you don't understand what this phrase means, please rent and watch the documentary *Bowling for Columbine*. It's in the second half, where Charlton Heston appears.



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Kino pulled the trigger as she spoke the transformation phrase. The hammer struck the firing pin and the sound of the igniting primer rang out.

Kino's body was then wrapped in a brilliant light. The background suddenly changed from the music room to a suspicious neon-coloured space, accompanied by upbeat music. This is all pre-recorded.

Then, Kino's body spun around several times, her naked figure appeared in silhouette, and tendrils of light wrapped around her from head to toe to turn into clothing. I'll leave this part up to your imagination.

Once the brilliant light had faded--

"Transformation complete! 'Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino'! You can eat after you've fought!" Hermes yelled.

Her appearance hadn't changed radically, but Kino was now "Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino", a Warrior of Justice with superhuman strength and fighting skills. This Kino would be able to easily finish off five of yesterday's "Mount Fuji" dishes.

"Seriously? Maybe I'll head over there once I'm finish-AAHHHHHHH!"

Kino screamed and fell to her knees. She bowed her head, hands on the ground.

"What's wrong?" Hermes asked from his spot on her belt.

"I should have gone to take the challenge menu yesterday after transforming! Then I could have had all of that deliciousness for



GAKUEN KINO

free! Oh, I'm such an idiot... Why?! Why must Fate be so cruel?! If only! If only I could go back in time...! Time! Come back! The scent of lavender! Numbers on your arms! Let the storm come! Come on a DeLorean! Doesn't matter if it's a fridge or a washing machine! Open the drawers!"

Kino punched the ground in a state of confusion. Cracks appeared in the floor. She could end up destroying the school if she wasn't careful.

"Don't waste time thinking like that. You have to hurry and seal away that demon. Get up."

"Ohhh... All right." Kino replied, and stood up. She holstered the demon-slaying gun she held--the Big Cannon~Shining Iron Demon Destroyer, which could only be fired once per transformation.

She then took out one of countless firearms from the pouch on her belt. It was a Sturm Ruger GP-100 .357 Magnum 4-inch revolver.

As a side note, the "Ruger" of Sturm Ruger is different from the German *Luger*. It's just a shortened name for this American manufacturer. This won't be on the final exam.

"Hmph. I guess I'll be using this one today. Doesn't really matter as long as I have something to shoot with."

Kino, saying something that would either enrage or make jealous a gun maniac, took out a lotus root-shaped magazine and checked to see if it was loaded. She then opened the music room door.

The portraits of Bach and Beethoven watched from behind as Kino left to do battle.



VOLUME 02

Meanwhile, what could have happened to the lady commander and the sole remaining member of the Anti-Demon Corps? Was she still bravely fighting off the demon?

"AAAAHHHH!"

Was she firing away on automatic with a Type 89 machine gun in each hand? Was she acting as a shining example of valour?

Actually, absolutely not.

"Kyaaa!"

She was being chased down the hall by the demon, screaming shrilly.

She occasionally turned and fired, but the 9mm rounds all missed their mark.

It seems like this so-called commander's gun mastery was in the negative range. She fired again, and a lightbulb shattered.

This demon was about tall enough for its head to reach the ceiling. It looked like a bipedal lion with strangely good posture. The demon mercilessly continued chasing.

The demon itself, or more specifically, the person within the demon, had no inkling of the fact that he was currently chasing a young woman around the school building.

An exciting adventure unfolded in his fantasy world.



GAKUEN KINO

After being transported to a land of sword and sorcery with eight moons by a beautiful mage named Bell, he met the Queen who ruled this world and easily drew the legendary sword in the stone and was hailed as a hero, and found out that for some reason, he was able to use magic in this world. He quarrelled on occasion with his party members, but these arguments only served to strengthen their bonds as they left on a journey to defeat the mysterious Overlord who plotted to take over this world (party members include: Himself, Bell, a Knight, a Nun, an Ex-Thief, and a Cleric). They matured as they saved countless villages and defeated countless villains. Everything was going well until they boarded a ship that would take them to another continent, but they were shipwrecked and scattered by a storm conjured up by the Overlord. Stranded alone with Bell, who had been rendered unable to use magic by an extremely high fever, he had been nursing her back to health and was debating if he should take off some of her clothing to ease her pain. I'm sorry for the long paragraph.

Meanwhile, the commander was still being pursued by the demon, sweating profusely.

"Oh...!"

Unfortunately, she found herself at a dead end.

The staircase she had arrived at was closed off by an explosion-proofed emergency shutter. It was over. Even if she put her back to the wall and fired away at the charging demon, she was out of ammo. She had no extra ammunition, either.



VOLUME 02

"..."

The commander didn't even have the strength to fight back.

Suddenly, the demon turned right around.

In the mind of the young man within the demon, he had finally decided that he should remove Bell's clothing and had just reached for her chest when a lady from their party (Class: Nun. But everything she did was so outrageous that her holiness was in question) purposely walked in on the scene, asking "Oh my. I hope I'm not interrupting anything?"

Don't let your guard down, commander.

The demon ripped out a handful of its own mane and tossed it into the air. Each strand turned into a monster that looked like an orangutan drawn by a child.

The demon had left, but the commander was surrounded by dozens of newly-formed monsters. They roared as they surrounded her, claws unsheathing from their hands.

"No... no..." The commander sobbed as she backed into the wall. No hope left. It was all over.

ROAAAAAR! With a single cry, the demons charged at her simultaneously. They were now at 3 metres. 2 metres. 1 metre. 50 centimetres.

Moments before she would be torn to pieces, she let out a sharp scream out of sheer terror.

"NOOOOO!"



GAKUEN KINO

Suddenly--

BOOM!

A huge explosion ripped through the hallway. Grey smoke immediately filled the area.

And the monsters--

And the commander--

Both disappeared from sight.

The school-shaking explosion was felt by--

"Huh? What was that?"

Kino, who was running through the halls,

"Lalala~ Hm?"

and Samoyed Mask, who had been humming as he cut down the shutters in the halls because they were in his way.

However, neither of them currently had any way of knowing what was going on.

"I'd better hurry before the pervy samurai appears."

"I must hurry so that I may show off my awesomeness to Mysterious Kino."

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They mumbled, as they followed Hermes' directions and sense of smell respectively towards the demon.

The fans and the school ventilation systems kicked into effect. The smoke began to clear.

ROAR! The demons, blinded by the smoke, could be seen confusingly groping their way around this dead-end hallway.

When the grey smoke finally cleared completely, the dozens of monsters came back into view, unchanged from before, and--

The poor, shredded commander was not there.

Neither was the sobbing and cowering commander.

"..."

But there was a small girl, quietly standing with her gaze to the floor.

The demons cocked their heads. Understandable, as just moments ago it was a grown woman standing before them, but now there was only a small girl of perhaps ten or twelve years standing before them in this blocked-off hallway.

The girl wore grey shorts that showed off her stick-thin legs and a brown sweater with a round neck.



GAKUEN KINO

There was a large pouch on the back of the shirt, and there were protective pads on her elbows. Her knees were similarly cushioned, and her bare feet were tucked away in rubber shoes.

"..."

The girl slowly raised her head.

She had short white hair and emerald-green eyes.

It was difficult to tell from her face if she had any emotions. She glared at the demons with eyes of quintessential stoicism.

The monsters, having hesitated at the girl's still appearance, reminded themselves that they were facing a little brat and raised their claws.

Oh, the poor girl.

"..."

The girl moved without a sound. She reached for the pouch on her back with both hands, and took out--

A dozen grenades. They were Mk 2 models, used by the American military until the Vietnam War.

The safety pins had already been pulled. The girl tossed the grenades as if tossing feed to a flock of birds. The safety pins bounced off the ground with a high-pitched *ting*.

The demons stood dumbly in confusion. And three seconds later--



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Every grenade exploded. The noise of the twelve explosions merged into one, and smoke and shrapnel flew everywhere.

Grenades for use against people don't burst into flames in large amounts when they go off. The heat from the explosion creates fragments that go flying everywhere to murder anything unlucky enough to be hit by them.

The bulletproof glass and the shutters shook, and small pieces of debris fell from the ceiling.

When the smoke cleared again--

"..."

The girl was standing there unscathed.

She silently walked away, over the ashes--all that remained of the monsters.

At the same time, the demon was rampaging through the Home Economics classroom. They were baking cookies in here until just a little while ago, with one of the girls excitedly baking for a boy she liked, but those cookies had been turned to dust.

The demon destroyed the ovens with its gigantic claws. However, an adventure was still ongoing in the mind of the person within.

It was a dramatic sequence in which the party had worked together to defeat a mid-boss at the castle at the top of a great valley.



GAKUEN KINO

The plot was thickening. Everyone had vowed there to head for the Overlord's Castle, but at that very moment--

The spear of the not-quite-dead mid-boss pierced Bell's frail form.

"Ah..."

The bloodied spear made its way right through Bell.

And she fell into the abyss, in front of everyone's eyes.

"Bell!"

He desperately reached out to her, but his hands grasped nothing but thin air. The magic he cast with all his strength also failed him. He called Bell's name over and over, but Bell disappeared into the depths of the dark valley. It was so deep that they couldn't even hear her landing.

Losing his cool, he asserted that they should go and rescue Bell.

"It's unfortunate, but it is highly unlikely that she is still alive. We must hurry on to the Overlord's Castle." the Knight retorted calmly. There was a fight. An internal struggle. Exchanging of fists.

The knight's opinion was extremely rational. If the rumours that "The Overlord is grooming a successor, a terrible man who could truly destroy the world", were true, they had no time to waste.

However, he refused outright. The nun finally stepped in and suggested that they search for Bell and give up if she was dead. So the party went down into the valley depths. His heart was heavy as



VOLUME 02

he led the others into the abyss, having completely forgotten that this was all just a dream.

In reality, he was crushing pots with his thick legs and breaking tables in two with his hands.

"..."

A young man wearing sunglasses watched this demon from the classroom entrance.

He was dressed in black. He wore black boots, black pants, black gloves, and a black trenchcoat that came down to his knees. He was covered from head to toe in black. Even his sunglasses, which concealed his expression, were black.

His hair, however, was white. It was pristine white, the colour of snow. He had pulled back this long white hair into a clean ponytail.

In each hand he held an MP5K submachine gun. It was a compact submachine gun 33 centimetres in length, using 9mm shells.

He had already loaded, removed the safety, and set the gun to automatic. All he had to do now was pull the trigger. However--

"He's late..." He muttered bitterly. The guns were aimed at the ground, and his thumbs were pointed straight. It didn't look like he was going to open fire.

"He's late... he's still not here..."



GAKUEN KINO

It seemed that the demon was not his target. The demon stalked out of the Home Economics room, but the young man in black did nothing but watch.

And--

"You're late, Samoyed Mask!" he spat.

Yup. He's still not here. Please pass the time with these two flashback sequences.



VOLUME 02

Flashback 1.

A young man wearing a green sweater and a white dog were at a sunset beach.

The young man stood at the water's edge, under the fiery skies. The dog sat at his feet.

The young man, who had a sword at his waist, opened his right hand with a melancholy look. In his hand was a dented old screw.

The white dog asked quietly, "Master Shizu? What is it that you are looking at?"

The young man called Shizu answered, looking at the screw in his hand.

"A piece of Buggy-kun..."⁴

The young man clenched his fist, held it over his heart, and looked up at the sky.

"I'll never forget you..."

So his trusted servant also nodded.

"Nor will I."

The person and the dog watched as the red sun silently slipped past the horizon.

End Flashback 1.

⁴ "Buggy-kun" refers to Shizu's mode of transport in Kino's Journey, a buggy.



Flashback 2.

A young man lay collapsed in a snowing cathedral. He wore a green sweater and had a katana strapped to his belt.

Lying still and limp beside the young man was a large white dog.

Looking down at them was a great painting by a great Baroque period artist.

The young man, embracing the dog, looked up at the painting with his deathly ashen face, his breath visible in the cold.

"Look, Buchi... A Rubens painting..."

The white dog corrected his master.

"My name is Riku, Master Shizu."

"I'm so happy..."

"I'm glad for you, Master Shizu. But-"

"Rikurasche... I'm so tired... I'm feeling sleepy..."

"Quite obviously, since you slept very late last night... Anyway, you're very heavy, Master Shizu-"

"I'm sorry, grandpa... I'm going to rest now..."

"You may rest, Master Shizu, but please get off of me. You're very heavy."

"Rikurasche... Let's rest... together."

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"I'll have to decline."

"Oh, Rikurasche... I can see time..."

"That's from another series, Master Shizu."⁵

End Flashback 2.

⁵ This scene is a parody of "A Dog of Flanders", but Shizu's last line in the scene is from Mobile Suit Gundam.



GAKUEN KINO

The target of the young man wearing sunglasses did not appear, even after the strangely familiar flashback sequences.

"Dammit!"

The young man, having finally lost his patience--

"Defeat Shizu"

Began writing this phrase over and over on the blackboard in tiny writing.

"Found it!"

Kino, having followed Hermes' directions through the school building, finally discovered the demon.

It was stalking through the third floor hallway. Kino could see the demon walking with its back turned.

Her right hand tightly grasped the GP-100. The demon merely kept walking away, not even looking back. On its right was a window overlooking the grounds. On its left was a deserted classroom.

"Huh...? I guess this demon's not targeting me?"

"Seems that way. Looks like this one's just going around without any particular purpose. I guess this student doesn't really have problems or worries?"

Kino and Hermes spoke.



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But they were incorrect. The student was currently searching for Bell in a deep, dark valley. He was on the verge of tears, worried that she might have died.

They found a trail of blood leading behind several boulders. He followed them behind the rocks, despite worrying that he would be greeted by a sight he may not have wanted to see. And he found her.

"Bell..."

Bell lay collapsed on the ground.

The beautiful girl in outlandish clothing lay almost eerily still in a pool of blood. The moment he hurried over and reached out to touch her, Bell's eyes snapped open. Her yellow and purple eyes reflected his tearful face.

"Bell... you're alive..."

She was alive. Bell was alive. There was blood everywhere, but she was uninjured. We've found a survivor! Bring a stretcher!

He embraced Bell awkwardly and with a great deal of embarrassment, shedding tears of joy. The party members following behind him, however, became suspicious.

"How could she have survived those injuries and the fall?"

The knight, who had been ordered on this journey by the Queen, became suspicious of Bell from this moment on.



GAKUEN KINO

Actually, he had been ordered earlier by the corrupt Prime Minister to get rid of the hero should he be proven a fake. This is foreshadowing.

A thin stream of tears flowed from Bell's eyes. She kissed him on the cheek, thanking him through her actions. And--

"I... won't die.... as long as you're alive... I'll be by your side. And... I'll never betray 'you'."

She smiled delicately. This is also foreshadowing.



VOLUME 02

Chapter 4: *Chako's Explosive Story* -Tea Breaks!- (Part 2)

Kino had come to a point at which she could finally defeat the beautifully dreaming demon in one shot.

"Should I just shoot it in the back?"

"Why not?"

Kino and Hermes were discussing the situation.

"Isn't it kinda underhanded?"

"Doesn't matter, does it?"

"I think I can get it in one hit. You think I should?"

"Why not?"

"I guess... then it'd be all over."

Watching the demon staggering away, a mere metre from her, Kino put her GP-100 back in her pouch, not having fired a single shot. She then drew Big Cannon from the holster on her belt. It was a weapon that could only be fired once per transformation, but any demon who was hit would regain human form.

"All right! At this rate, I'll finish in time for lunch! Food, food!" Kino said happily as she released the hammer.

She could shoot with one hand, but firmly held the gun in both hands, just in case.



GAKUEN KINO

"That was easy."

All Kino had to do now was put pressure on the thumb resting on the trigger!

At that moment--

CRASH!

A bulletproof window shattered, frame and all, before Kino's eyes. A white shadow jumped into the hall from the classroom.

"Hyah!"

The one standing in the hall as glass shards rained down upon him was a man dressed in white.

A white standing-collar uniform, and a fluttering white cape.

At his waist was a sword housed in a black scabbard. His handsome face was covered by a mask, and his head was decorated with a pair of white puppy ears and a bright red apple.

"..."

Kino was silent.

There is only one character in this novel who is so stupidly outrageous. One is more than enough.

"I see you may need my help!" said the pervert, getting to his feet as soon as he had landed and showing off his sparkling white teeth.



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Across from him, the former sitting duck--the demon, had begun to flee, scared by the loud noise.

"When the maiden of justice finds herself in danger--a lone knight descends from the distant skies!" said the pervert, while appearing more like he was rescuing the demon.

"It has been a while, Mysterious Kino! Have you kind words of love for this familiar face?"

"GET OUT OF MY WAY!"

Kino's answer was immediate.

Screaming, she pulled out an M4 carbine with a 100-round magazine, turned off the safety in the blink of an eye, and fired away on automatic.

The hall was filled with the din of bullets as shell casings fell to the floor like waterfalls. The 5.56mm rounds fired from the M4 flew at Pervert Mask faster than the speed of sound. However--



GAKUEN KINO

"Your reaction troubles me, Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino."

The pervert drew at the speed of light, and swung his katana at inhuman speed. Every last bullet was either blocked by the sword or a tomato from the man's pocket.

Click.

The number of round remaining dropped to zero. The bolt, having gone back and forth 99 times, stopped in place. A hundred shell casings littered the floor.

"Hah... hah..."

Kino breathed heavily, shoulders heaving in rage and fatigue.

"And I had missed you oh so much... Well, I suppose it may be a bit much to demand a mature, romantic reunion from a young lady like yourself." The pervert spoke like an old man, and wiped the tomatoes from his mask with a no-name brand handkerchief.

The demon had already rounded the corner and disappeared from the hallway.

"You... pervert... no, Samoyed Mask... you got a grudge against me or something?" Kino asked the pervert--Samoyed Mask--with a stony grin on her face. As a side note, a Samoyed is a breed of dog from Russia, known for its long, soft, white fur and a face that makes it look like it's always smiling. Riku is one.

Samoyed Mask cocked his head and replied, "Absolutely not."



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"Then... you're just doing this for your sick amusement...?" Kino asked again. Samoyed Mask smiled even more broadly and responded.

"I do not partake amusement from this, Mysterious Kino. My only motive is pure, unadulterated love for you that drives me to strive to protect you, a warrior of justice. Even though you are completely flat-chested."

BANG!

Kino opened fire with a Sturm Ruger Blackhawk .44 Magnum Revolver, having drawn and shot with her left hand.

"You rotten bastard!" she screamed. Kino released the hammer and--*BANG!* She fired again.

"What colour is your blood supposed to be?!"⁶

(What could it be? Please pick from the five choices below.

- A. Red
- B. Rouge
- C. Rosso
- D. Tomato-coloured
- E. All of the above. This question is worth 20 points.)

Samoyed Mask, holding a placard stating the above, dodged Kino's shots *BANG!* by moving his head. After all, *BANG!* accurate shots were easiest to dodge. It was *BANG!* partially Kino's fault, though, *BANG!* for stubbornly continuing to aim at his forehead and nowhere else.

⁶ A line from Fist of the North Star. It's basically Kino asking if Samoyed β is even human.



GAKUEN KINO

She had spent all six rounds, and was out of ammo.

"Hah... hah..."

That was a total waste of bullets, and all Kino got in return was more fatigue. She fell to her knees in exhaustion.

Samoyed Mask took the time to begin introducing himself to Kino.

"I am 'Samoyed Mask β, the Pristine Guardian Attempter'! Is your town in need of justice? Call now, and I will rush to your aid!"

The BGM this time was--youwantmetostopokayokayI'llstopitnow

"I didn't call you!" Kino yelled, head bowed. Of course, Samoyed Mask β would not be going around dressed like this in the first place if he cared about something so trivial.

"Now, Mysterious Kino. Let us protect justice together. There was once a quote from a film that said 'Half the world will be outraged if we protect justice'⁷, but that does not matter! As long as the other half can truly smile, our battle--our sacrifice will surely not be in vain."

Samoyed Mask β was being surprisingly serious today. He was not himself. Maybe it was something he ate?

"And I hope this 'other half' will all be young women."

Never mind, it's him. Wait a sec, isn't that biologically impossible?

⁷ Direct translation, as I can't figure out what this is supposed to be referencing.

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"You must work hard to make your dreams come true!"

Ain't gonna happen.

"No..."

Kino staggered to her feet, behind the teary-eyed Samoyed Mask β.

"I... want to get rid of that demon ASAP..."

"That is why this is no time for you to be sitting around here, Mysterious Kino! You must work hard in inverse proportion to your chest size."

"..."

TING. Some sort of seed appeared in Kino's mind.⁸ She got the urge to fire every single weapon in her arsenal at Samoyed Mask β, but she barely managed to restrain herself.

"Dammit..." She swore instead of firing. Bullets had zero effect on this masked pervert.

"Damn... how do you dodge bullets like that?"

Samoyed Mask β immediately raised his pointer finger and replied.

"That is a good question! I shall answer--"

"And the answer is?!" Kino practically yelled.

⁸ A reference to SEED Mode from Gundam SEED.



GAKUEN KINO

Samoyed Mask β smiled refreshingly.

"It is because I can hear the breath of the wind."

"Wha-?"

"The winds created by bullets... if I can feel this wind, I can detect the bullet beforehand and dodge it. It is a simple task. Anyone can do it--in fact, it would be strange for anyone to *not* be able..."

"..."

Kino immediately regretted asking *him* for any coherent answers.

She then recalled that this was a painfully familiar situation, and remembered the phrase "Even a monkey can do little more than regret.".

"Now, let us destroy that demon together!"

Watching the energetic Samoyed Mask β, Kino quietly muttered, "So guns aren't the only answer..."

This wasn't the kind of thing that a normal schoolgirl would say, but let's put that aside for now.

"Anyway, my goal for this term is to get my hands on a powerful superweapon that can annihilate that pervert."

Kino steeled her resolve.

"I hope that works out." Hermes said, as if this was none of his business. Which was true, in a sense.



VOLUME 02

Putting resolutions aside, the demon was still on the loose.

"Got it? Don't bother me!" Kino said to Samoyed Mask β, and drew another firearm from her pouch. It was a Czech-made CZ 100 double action semi-automatic handgun. She loaded it and began walking the halls, following the demon, ignoring Samoyed Mask β.

"Then let us go!" Samoyed Mask β followed after Kino like a dog.

"..."

Veins began popping in Kino's forehead. She didn't turn around, however. Kino did her best to continue ignoring him. *'I can't play into his hands. I have to ignore him semipermanently. I decided to do that in chapter one, but why did I keep talking to him at all?!'* Kino was feeling a great deal of regret.

Of course, Samoyed Mask β followed from behind, asking things like,

"Guess what? What do you think we should name our combination attack?"

or,

"Guess what? It's cheating to wear leggings under your skirt."

but Kino ignored him completely.

Every time, she longed to switch from the CZ 100 to Big Cannon, but Hermes would always hold her back.

But--



GAKUEN KINO

"Come to think of it... you know, on those hot summer nights when you don't cover your feet with your blanket? Do you not sometimes feel something suddenly pulling at your ankles?"

Kino reacted to this one. Getting goosebumps all over, she turned around and--

"Kyaaaa! What was that for?! Now I'll never be able to sleep with my feet out!"

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

she wasted five rounds with her CZ 100. Five innocent tomatoes also lost their lives.

Suddenly--

"Perhaps you need my assistance?"

A mysterious voice spoke to the duo. Its source was soon revealed to be the young man in black, who was writing "Defeat Shizu" on the blackboard not too long ago.

"Oh! It's you!"

His face was familiar to Kino.

"Detective Wanwan!"

The young man called 'Detective Wanwan' nodded.

That's right. His name was Detective Wanwan.



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He was a skilled young man who had mastered the Septuple-Gun Fist Style, a fearsome art founded by Prince Shotoku which involved dual-wielding a pair of guns at incredible speeds.

Of course, you wouldn't need any further explanation if you have already read the first book. And there's no reason for anyone who hasn't read it to have bought this one.

However, this young man's true identity was still a mystery that had yet to be revealed in the story. Who could he possibly be? Hey, you there! Stop laughing.

In Kino's mind, 'Detective Wanwan = A pretty useful guy'.

So she smiled and greeted him.

"Hey! It's been a while. Kinda late today, aren't ya?"

Her attitude towards him was polar opposite to the way she had treated Samoyed Mask β earlier.

"Tch. Luckybastardluckybastard."

Samoyed Mask β kicked a pebble aside, sulking.

"I'm sorry I'm late. I had something to take care of, you see..." Detective Wanwan apologized quietly, with an expressionless face.

Kino replied with words like 'no, don't worry about it', and 'I didn't mean it like that', but Detective Wanwan could never tell her the truth that he was late because he had been so focused on writing "Defeat Shizu" on the blackboard.



GAKUEN KINO

That blackboard was currently whiter than the tundra in February. Detective Wanwan, not satisfied after having filled the board with "Defeat Shizu" in normal-sized letters, began filling up the gaps in the letters 'D', for instance, with tiny "Defeat Shizu"s. With a bloodcurdling expression, at that.

"All right! Now that all three of us are gathered here, we must charge! Charge at the demon!"

Smiling, Samoyed Mask β raised his katana into the air. Kino and Detective Wanwan followed the pervert for now. However--

Whisperwhisperwhisper?

Whisperwhisper. Whisperwhisperwhisper. Whisper?

Whisperwhisper. Whisperwhisperwhisper.

Kino and Detective Wanwan spoke quietly amongst themselves. Their conversation consisted entirely of ways in which they could get rid of Samoyed Mask β once they had sealed away the demon.

Meanwhile, in a certain student's head--

"You have done well to make it this far, warriors!" said the Overlord, proudly sitting in his throne. He looked just like any fifty-year old man, but he carried himself like an Overlord. He wore a black cape and was wearing a helmet adorned with strange horns.

The story in this dream was nearing its climax. The party had finally arrived at the Overlord's Castle, having braved all kinds of peril and defeated many enemies. However, just as our hero bravely drew his sword and charged at the Overlord--



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"Excellent job in guiding my pawns here, Bell." the Overlord said suddenly. And while our hero was still reeling in shock, Bell slipped away from the party and walked up to the Overlord's throne.

"It can't be... Bell, please tell me he's lying!"

He was astonished.

"I knew it!"

The knight's suspicions were confirmed.

"..."

And as Bell looked on sadly, the Overlord began explaining her true identity.

Just as anyone could tell from how she travelled through time and space, Bell was not human. No normal human in this world could do such a thing. She was a being created by the Overlord's great power. *Da-dun!* (sfx)

She only existed because the Overlord wished dearly for her existence. She would simply fade away should the Overlord be killed.

That was why Bell could never betray him. That was why she had completed her mission of bringing the hero and his party to the Overlord.

"But why would you want to bring me here?" He asked, and the Overlord replied with something resembling fondness.



GAKUEN KINO

"Hero from across time and space--does my face not look familiar to you?"

The hero fell into thought for a moment, and answered that the Overlord somewhat resembled his own father.

The Overlord grinned, and stood up from his throne. He swished his cape and revealed the shocking truth!

"That is only natural! After all, I am--"

"It can't be! You are my father?!"

"No."

Luke, he is not your father?

"I am... you!"

The Overlord's explanation went thus:

The hero and the Overlord were the same person. He had crossed time and space to come to this place. However, this was a very long time ago. Alone, he was persecuted in this place so far away from home.

The wise Queen's predecessor was a typical tyrant, and the world was, accordingly, a terrible place.

Having his hopes broken and dreams destroyed, he strayed from the path of good. He trained himself in magic and eventually became Overlord. Welcome to the Dark Side.



VOLUME 02

"I am old now. My body is a wreck, twisted by the overuse of magics. You should have seen my last checkup results. And here I was, so close to taking over this world completely. That is why I chose and summoned another 'me', to take my place as Overlord."

"Me?!"

"That is correct. You can never trust anyone but yourself--therefore, you are the only one fit to succeed me!"

That was why he created Bell, the kind of girl that his younger self would follow after without question, as his guide to this world. All in order to make him the next Overlord.

"That 'Legendary Sword' multiplies your power. And as its master, you and Bell will succeed me and rule this world together!"

All of their hard work, and the slow but steady increase in the adventure's difficulty was for the ultimate purpose of training him.

Most protagonists in adventure stories don't die, but in this case, he was alive *because* he was the "hero". All of this was part of the Overlord's plot. The Queen and the other party members had assisted in this scheme without even knowing the truth.

"How... how could this be...?"

Having been betrayed by his beloved Bell, and having inadvertently betrayed his trusted party members, he--

RAWWWWWWWWWR!



GAKUEN KINO

The demon was crying out .

RAWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWR!

The demon was crying out in the A/V room. It was breaking desks, smashing the projectors, and ripping the curtains as if in serious denial.

And the trio was watching all this from beside the door. Kino, Samoyed Mask β, and Detective Wanwan were quietly spying on it from the hallway.

"I can get it... in one shot, from this distance. I'll just slowly sneak into the classroom, and BANG!"

Kino said quietly, making sure the demon wouldn't hear.

"In that case, I will provide support fire to make sure the demon does not produce any monsters." said Detective Wanwan, in a reliably quiet voice. He held in each hand a Desert Eagle .50 AE, known for the destructive quality of each individual shot.

"What about me?" asked Samoyed Mask β.

'*Go away.*', and '*Go to Hell.*' were Kino and Detective Wanwan's honest opinions, but they weren't childish enough to say these things in the current situation.

"Hmm... How about you watch our backs from the hallway?"

"That sounds like the right course of action. We'll trust you with this task."

These were very mature responses. Of course, adults are all liars.



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Now that they had decided on a course of action, it was time to begin preparations. Kino checked the Big Cannon, and Detective Wanwan confirmed that the Desert Eagle's safety was off. The bored Samoyed Mask β, who had nothing but a katana--

"Ta-da! It's a dove!"

quietly practiced magic tricks.

It was finally time for the final battle.

The people in the demon's head were also in the middle of their final battle. The party attacked the Overlord (and Bell).

"Oh no... what am I supposed to do...?" He cradled his head.

And the demon stopped as if in correspondence. It was a great opening for Kino and the others.

"All right! Let's go on the count of five! Got it?"

"I'm ready."

Five seconds until Kino and Detective Wanwan would unleash a combination attack.

Gulp. Kino swallowed.

Detective Wanwan took a deep breath.

2, 3, 4, 5-

"Charge!"



GAKUEN KINO

Was it Samoyed Mask β who counted '5'? It was way too fast. Hurrying in a situation like this could only bring about disaster. And that wasn't even the biggest problem.

"You idiot!"

"What're you doing?!"

BANG! Samoyed Mask β completely ignored the plan, jumped over the heads of the surprised Kino and Detective Wanwan, and loudly kicked down the door. He leapt into the A/V room.

Of course, the demon turned around, surprised by the noise. The planned sneak attack fell into oblivion.

Samoyed Mask β drew his katana in the middle of the classroom. Teeth sparkling, he shouted clearly--

"I am the Warrior of Justice who fights to defend this school, the nobly-named Samoyed Mask β, the Pristine Guardian Attempter! Now, let us fight like men!"

"What are you doing, challenging him to a duel?" Kino slapped her forehead.

"..."

Detective Wanwan was dumbstruck by this act of idiocy. Meanwhile, the demon reacted immediately and tore out some of its mane, tossing it around the room. Soon the A/V room filled up with monsters.

"Come at me!"

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Samoyed Mask β tapped his left hand lightly with his right hand, which was holding the katana. In an instant, a katana appeared in his left hand as well. This would be the first time he's showcased his dual-wielding. Magic is a wonderful thing.

RAAAAAWWR!

"Haaaaah!

Swishwhooshclangclangwhoosh!

Monsters charged at Samoyed Mask β from every direction. Samoyed Mask β, meanwhile, went on his invincible dual-wielding rampage. Monsters quickly went down and turned to ash, but the demon continued to create more of them. It seemed like this would turn into a battle of attrition.

"Now, Mysterious one! While I hold them off--you must finish it!" said Samoyed Mask β, almost being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers. However--

"What kind of movies do you like, Detective Wanwan?"

"Well... Actually, I'm quite fond of low-key romantic comedies."

"Really? That's surprising."

Kino and Detective Wanwan were having a lighthearted conversation, leaning against the wall that separated the hallway from the A/V room. It seemed they had given up on going inside.

"Mysterious Flat Chest! Perverted Peeping Sunglasses! Now! You must defeat the demon! I cannot last much longer!"



GAKUEN KINO

They could hear the sound of katanas swinging through the air, the demon's cries, and this voice from the A/V room.

"Me? These days I've been watching nothing but airplane-related movies. I happened to rent this old movie called 'Beagles - The Soldier Who Crossed Time and Space'⁹, and it was pretty good."

"Oh, I've seen that one on TV back in Belgium. It's the one with the ordinary New Yorker being sent back in time to World War I and becoming a pilot, correct? It was an unusual concept, but I enjoyed it as well."

"Yeah, I really like those biplanes. I wanna try piloting one someday."

"That sounds wonderful. Should the opportunity present itself, please allow me to ride with you."

"You want a ride? Great! But I can't guarantee your safety."

"Hahaha! What a scary thought."

Kino and Detective Wanwan ignored Samoyed Mask β completely.

"Damn! Whoa! What the-! Tch. Ack!"

Samoyed Mask β's voice was becoming more and more desperate.

"Sounds like he's just about finished."

⁹ Another direct translation. I'm not even sure if this is an actual movie or not.



VOLUME 02

"Yes. Any minute now..."

Kino and Detective Wanwan's voices were becoming more and more terrifying.

"Gyaah! Ouch! Dammit! Oh... Gak..."

Samoyed Mask β was in trouble.

And when Pervert Mask finds himself in danger--

"Looks like I'll be much better off now... I hope it's sunny tomorrow, too."

The heroine does nothing but worry about the weather!

"..."

Of course, there was no way Detective Wanwan would go in to help, either. He had wanted to land the killing blow himself, but beggars can't be choosers. He must be thinking, '*This is an acceptable conclusion*' right about now.

"Whoa!"

Looks like Samoyed Mask β was finished. The sound of steel cutting air vanished. They could now hear the sound of an apple being crushed. The end was nigh.

"..."

Kino soundlessly readied Big Cannon.

"..."



GAKUEN KINO

Detective Wanwan, equally silent, readied his grip on the Desert Eagles.

"..."

And the girl soundlessly walked right by them.

"Huh?"

"Hm?"

The girl? Kino and Detective Wanwan looked at each other, unable to believe their eyes.

She was real. They definitely saw her--a little girl passing under their lines of sight and travelling from left to right.

The astonished duo looked to their right.

They thought she might have been a ghost, but she was definitely corporeal. She was a mysterious girl with white hair. She wore grey shorts that showed off her stick-thin legs and a brown shirt with a circular cut.

The girl stopped in front of the closed A/V room door and reached for the handle with her tiny hands.

"Wait! Don't go inside!"

Kino hurriedly tried to stop her.

"Please! It's dangerous to go in right now!"



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Detective Wanwan was equally desperate. This girl was definitely no student. She must surely be a child living in the area, having wandered in by accident.

However--

"..."

The girl stared at them wordlessly. And she spoke for the first time, looking at them with her emerald-green eyes. It was a surprisingly long sentence.

"I can't just abandon him. After all, *he'd* choose to die rather than abandon me."

"?"

"?"

Neither Kino nor Detective Wanwan understood what she meant. Only Hermes reacted ("*Ohhh.*''), muttering quietly.

This was so sudden that the duo was frozen for about three seconds.

"Oh!"

"Look out!"

The moment they were shocked back into reality--

BOOM!

The A/V room exploded.



GAKUEN KINO

"Whoa!"

"Grk...!"

Kino and Detective Wanwan were caught in the force of the blast. The walls cracked but held, but the door was not so lucky. Black and grey smoke spilled out into the hallways, and was sucked into the ventilation shaft.

"What just happened...?"

"This scent... Those were Mk 2 grenades!"

Kino and Detective Wanwan stood at the doorway, preparing to fire.

And what greeted them was--

The sight of the ruined A/V room.

The sight of the floor, caked with several centimetres of ashes that used to be monsters.

The sight of the ceilings and walls, over five broken katanas and a lot of shrapnel sticking out of them.

The sight of the demon's hind leg as it escaped through the window.

"..."

And the sight of--

"Ohhh..."



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Samoyed Mask β, eyes spinning, chicks circling his head, and the unharmed girl, holding him upright by his collar.

There was a pile of grenade pins at her feet. It collapsed with a clatter.

"..."

"..."

Kino and Detective Wanwan were at a loss for words, but they were sure of one thing--this girl had destroyed all the monsters and rescued Samoyed Mask β.

"Who in the world... is that girl...?"

Cold sweat ran down Kino's face.

"Oh...! Why can't I remember...? She seems so familiar..." Detective Wanwan muttered.

The girl ignored them both and let go of Samoyed Mask β's collar, dropping him to the ground.

Samoyed Mask β slid to the floor, scattering ashes all over the floor. The girl grabbed his collar again and lifted his head.

Then--

"Open your eyes."

She began slapping his face back and forth.

smacksmacksmacksmacksmacksmacksmacksmacksmack-



GAKUEN KINO

Her hand moved at the speed of light. The sounds melded together because of her sheer speed. The friction between her hand and the air set her hand on fire.

smacksmacksmacksmacksmack!

About when the girl had landed 200 slaps in two seconds--

"Oh..."

Samoyed Mask β came to. The girl's hand went still.

"Oh... I'm saved..."

Samoyed Mask β lightly shook his head. His mask obscured his eyes, but it seemed they were open now.

"Much thanks, Mysterious Ki-"

The one standing before him was a little girl who was decidedly not Kino. Samoyed Mask β stopped in the middle of speaking.

"Oh? You're..."

He looked at the girl. Then--

"AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!"

He screamed at an inhumanly high frequency, sharply enough to shatter the bulletproof windows.

Both Kino and Detective Wanwan were shocked by the scream. They ducked and covered their ears.

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After finishing his scream, cold sweat began running down Samoyed Mask β's face. His ever-present smile was replaced by the chattering of his teeth.

"You okay?" the girl asked Samoyed Mask β. Her face was expressionless, but there was something resembling fondness in her tone of voice. Upon hearing it, however, Samoyed Mask β screamed again.

"NNNNNNNOoooooooooooo!"

This time, he crawled backwards into a corner of the A/V room, kicking up ashes. And to everyone's genuine shock, this calm man burst into tears.

"No... I don't like pain... no... please... stay away..."

Clutching his head in his little corner, Samoyed Mask β wept like a child who was scared by a barking dog.

"..."

"..."

Kino and Detective Wanwan looked at Samoyed Mask β as though they had just discovered an afro-haired whale doing a handstand on a subway platform.

The dumbstruck Kino muttered, "What is this...? What am I seeing right now...? Why is he acting like that...?"

"I can't quite recall, but it seems he must have been heavily traumatized in the past."



GAKUEN KINO

The moment Detective Wanwan spoke--

"..."

The girl looked up, straight at him.

"Huh?"

She immediately flung herself at him, and in an instant was on his back. She mercilessly rubbed her chin and cheeks on his head.

"Eeek! Aaaahhhh! Stop it!"

Detective Wanwan ran around like a rodeo horse, but the girl stuck to him like a demon and would not let go.

"Who is that girl...? What in the world is she...?" Kino muttered, unconsciously stepping back.

"Ti..."

Kino suddenly heard a man's voice from near her feet. It was Samoyed Mask β, who had been crying just now.

"You know her?"

Samoyed Mask β looked up at Kino with his tear-streaked face. He sniffled and nodded.

"Ti..."

Nicknamed 'Grenade Girl'.



VOLUME 02

From 'There are no Kind Explosives', from Minmei Publishing Company." Samoyed Mask β answered Kino by briefly quoting.

"That's it? All you've told me are her name and the fact that she uses grenades." Kino replied, incredulous.

"Stop it! Somebody help me!"

She glanced at the girl perched atop Detective Wanwan, who was still desperately struggling.

"You two know each other?"

"I don't know... but--"

"But?"

"When I look at that girl, my stomach starts hurting... my side aches... like I've been stabbed by a knife. Oh, I don't want to die... The waves are getting distant now... I don't like pain... I don't like--"

Samoyed Mask β was never able to finish his sentence. He clutched his head again and began trembling. Psychological trauma is a scary thing.¹⁰

"Hey, can you name all the nutrients contained in pineapples?"

¹⁰ About Ti (continued) (**spoilers for Kino's Journey volume 8!**): At the end of volume 8 of Kino's Journey, Ti stabs Shizu in the stomach because he was about to leave her behind. Kino manages to diffuse the situation, and Ti joins Shizu and Riku on their travels. Also, Kuroshima-sensei's first name, Chako, is written with the characters for "Tea" and "Child"--"Tea" being a homophone for Ti's name.



GAKUEN KINO

"I don't know..." Samoyed Mask β answered immediately, head bowed.

It was strange that this nutrition freak wouldn't talk about bromelain, which dissipates proteins and helps in digesting meat products (but it's not too good with heat, so don't go for the canned kind), and potassium, which helps prevent high blood pressure. Looks like he was completely out of it.

"..."

Kino fell into thought. For Kino, it was thinking time.

"!"

She got an idea.

"Bell! Everyone! Stop it!"

At the Overlord's Castle, the heartbreakingly final battle was coming to an end.

The Overlord had used his magic to create powerful minions to torment the meddlesome party members.

"My god... What can I do...?"

His indecision reached its climax as he watched Bell attack their teammates.

Would he betray his friends and succeed as Overlord?



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Or, since it was partially his responsibility, would he defeat the Overlord and save this world?

If he chose the latter, however, his beloved Bell would vanish, fade away forever.

"What's wrong? Why do you hesitate? You only have one choice--take over this world and live happily with Bell. That is what Bell wants, as well. Come with your enchanted blade. I will gladly hand you this throne. This is your destiny!"

The Overlord began to goad him. The party had been reduced to moaning on the ground in pain. There was no way he could win. Besides, this wasn't even his own world--maybe this was for the best.

The moment his heart began leaning towards the Dark Side, however--

"Oh!"

He saw it. And came to a realization.

"Bell..."

Bell, who was attacking their friends, had a sorrowful look on her face. Bell, always smiling brightly during their adventures, looked like she was on the verge of tears.

And with that tearful face, she was about to impale the knight, who fought to the end, with a longsword.

"Oh... I see now." He mumbled.



GAKUEN KINO

Whoosh! The enchanted blade was unsheathed from its metal scabbard.

The knight, bracing for death, saw the legendary sword, and the boy from another world easily blocking Bell's attack.

"You..."

"Ah..."

Why you..."

Said the knight, Bell, and the Overlord respectively.

"I make my own future!" he shouted, as he parried Bell's sword and caught her from falling to the ground with his left arm. Then--

"I'll protect this world... and you."

He kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Oh..."

The beautiful girl, who had not too long ago been overwhelmed by grief, began shedding tears from her multicoloured eyes. With a bright smile on her face.

"You... You fool!" The Overlord screeched.

"I... I will choose my future for myself! I'm going to walk my own path! I don't believe in destiny!" He yelled, as he leapt up the steps to the Overlord's throne.

The Overlord's minions attacked him at once.



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"Out of my way!"

He climbed the steps, cutting down the minions with his sword. However, there were too many of them. One of the minions he didn't manage to finish off grabbed him by the ankles.

"Damn!"

In front of him, another minion raised its club. He was in trouble.

"AAAHHHH!"

The one sent flying into the air was not him, but the minion. The knight, charging in with a battle cry, had cut it down. The other party members joined the fray, despite their wounds.

"Everyone!"

"Go! Sometimes you really get on my nerves, but... I'll leave defeating 'you' to you!" The knight told him from behind.

"Thanks."

He charged.

"Why you little-!"

The Overlord chained magic spells against him, but he blocked them all with his sword and stepped towards the throne.

"Prepare yourself!"

He screamed for the last time.



GAKUEN KINO

Was he speaking to the Overlord, or himself?

The sword cleaved the Overlord in two.

"Oh..."

The Overlord's body, split down the centre, turned to mist. It faded into the air.

"I was actually... a strong person..."

These were the evil Overlord's--

"Good work..."

final words.

As the Overlord died, his magic began fading and his minions also vanished. Silence came upon the Overlord's castle.

And a girl fell to the ground.

It was Bell. The party rushed to her side.

"Bell!"

The one running down the steps was not the Overlord, but him. Oh! He was in such a hurry that he tripped down the stairs.

He gently held Bell in his arms. At this point, however, her breathing was very faint. They tried casting healing magic on her,



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but they were all repelled. It seemed these magics had no effect on nonhumans.

"I'll use *my* magic!"

He prayed to tie Bell's existence to this world. He prayed as hard as he could. However, his magic was not enough. It was actually quite lacking. Who am I kidding? It wasn't nearly enough.

It seemed there was no way to save Bell. She was fading away.

"Thank you... but my fate... is to vanish with the Overlord..." Bell began fading into green particles of light.

"I don't believe... in destiny..."

He suddenly did the unthinkable. With the sword, the legendary blade that could take over the world with its own power--

"Haaah!"

He pierced Bell's chest with the sword.

As the party watched in shock, the blade sunk deep into Bell's chest.

It soon disappeared all the way to the hilt.

Click.

Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino quietly moved her thumb.



GAKUEN KINO

She then silently raised Big Cannon~Shining Iron Demon Destroyer. Her target was the demon, soundlessly standing in the junior high division second-year classroom on the first floor.

It was somewhat melancholy, like a monkey listening to music with headphones.

Neither Samoyed Mask β nor Detective Wanwan were behind Kino.

"Hurry." Hermes urged quietly.

Kino put pressure on her pointer finger.

It was a little after noon.

Three seconds until the end of fourth period.

There was a small promontory in this land that had been restored to peace.

It was a beautiful place, with green grass fluttering in the wind. There was a wonderful view of the ocean. And there it was--

"The Overlord Rests Here"

A tombstone, inscriptions written in Japanese, facing the sea.

Clasping his hands in front of the grave was the hero of this world.

Beside him was Bell, and standing behind them was the rest of the party, bandaged and no longer armed.

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"You're leaving us...?" Bell asked as he finished a long prayer of repose.

He nodded quietly and told her that he would have to leave. Back to his home.

Bell pleaded with him to take her with him, to let her stay with him forever, but he shook his head.

"I can't bring along someone from this world, Bell. Please, be happy with everyone else."

He then kissed her softly.

The sound of bells rang across the skies.

Fourth period was about to end.

"Goodbye, Bell. Don't cry. You look so much prettier when you're smiling, so please--I promise I won't cry, either. Goodbye."

His adventure, as well, was coming to a close.

"Farewell... my hero... But... I promise... we'll meet again someday... someday..."

The moment Bell said this with a smile--

Kino pulled the trigger.

BANG!



GAKUEN KINO

Big Cannon released a single shot.

He faded away.

He disappeared into green particles of light, and Bell would gaze at him forever.

The girl's blue hair fluttered in the wind as she stood alone on the promontory.

"The Overlord's Grave"

She would stand in front of that grave for eternity.

Listening to the bell signalling the end of fourth period, and watching the demon shrinking back into the form of a male student--

"Oh... why... why..."

Kino mumbled softly.

"Huh? What's wrong?" Hermes asked from her belt. Kino holstered Big Cannon, and trembled as she clenched her fist.

"It's so easy when nobody's getting in my way! I'm talking about sealing demons!"

The bell was nearing its end. Samoyed Mask β, meanwhile--

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"It hurts... it hurts..."

was curled up in the A/V room in tears.

"..."

Standing in front of him and staring was a little girl named Ti. A little while ago, Kino had asked this of her:

"Watch over this person so he doesn't get in trouble, okay? Can you do it?"

"Yeah, I can."

Ti had been watching him the entire time since the conversation.

Detective Wanwan, whose sleekly tied hair was ruined by Ti's face rubbing against it, had fled as soon as Ti released him. He did not return.

Just as planned.

"Well, all you have to do is shoot it with Big Cannon. It's a breeze with your skills, Kino." Hermes said. Kino looked up at the sky.

"I know--I know who my real enemy is..."

"It's over." Ti said suddenly in the A/V room. The bell signalling the end of fourth period had just finished.



GAKUEN KINO

"I'm going back now." she said, as she slowly left the classroom, telling Samoyed Mask β that they would meet again. And as soon as she shut the door behind her--

Samoyed Mask β fell sideways onto the floor. Lying on the ash-covered floor, looking up at the shrapnel-laden ceiling, he muttered,

"That was close..."

Samoyed Mask β slowly reached for his mask with his left hand in this deserted A/V room. He then took off his mask.

As you all know, the face under the mask belonged to Shizu-senpai. He sighed and mumbled with a melancholy look.

"If it weren't for this mask, I wouldn't be alive..."

I think your logic's a bit flawed there.

"Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Kino has magnificently returned the demon to human form. All students may proceed to lunch. Fifth period will take place in classrooms that have finished cleaning up."

A peaceful broadcast came over the school's PA system. They were in the clear. Thank you, Mysterious Kino.

The students returned to safe classrooms in order to have lunch. As a side note, KAERE, the Anti-Demon Corps, had turned tail and run ages ago. All they left were tire tracks.

This lively lunch period, Kino went alone to the cafeteria and had hashed beef with rice. As she ate, a white-haired classmate of hers



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came and sat opposite her at the table, carrying a bowl of tempura udon.

"..."

Kino spared him a glance and ignored him.

"What kind of movies do you like, Kino?"

"I don't really watch movies."

Kino, having finished her meal, stood up in order to put her cutlery away.

Watching her was Inuyama--

"Hmph..."

who was smiling meaningfully.

And as soon as he raised his chopsticks--

"Found you!"

He heard a woman's voice from above him.

"It can't be..."

"Let's eat together!"

It was Kuroshima Chako-sensei. She was holding a platter with today's lunch (ham cutlet combo).



GAKUEN KINO

Leaning against his back, Chako-sensei put her chin on his head and placed her platter in front of the udon.

"Thanks for the meal!"

And surprisingly, she put sauce on the ham cutlet and began eating it in the same position.

Inuyama, hands trembling hard enough to break his chopsticks, spoke.

"... Kuroshima-sensei... I have something to ask..."

"What is it? You want one? Here, say ahhh..."

"No, that's not it!"

"Don't be shy! We're comrades!"

"What in the world-"

Inuyama ate the ham cutlet piece that was being held in front of him. At that moment--

"This feeling! I feel like... I know... before..."

Inuyama felt like he was surrounded by stars. Countless memories flashed in his head and disappeared in an instant. However, they were too foggy for him to make any sense of.

"What's wrong?"

"I can't remember! What happened...? What happened to me in the past...?!"

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Inuyama was in anguish.

"You're still young."

Chako-sensei muttered, as she gracefully snatched and ate the fried shrimp from Inuyama's udon.

"Hm. Tastes pretty good."

One last thing.

The young man who awoke in the nurse's office quietly began shedding tears.

He soundlessly shed enough tears to drench the pillow.

And during his remaining four-and-a-half years of student life, he never again turned into a demon.

And he was never reunited with the blue-haired girl named Bell.

But he never forgot his hour of adventures that day.

He reminisced about it many, many times. He typed up detailed records on his computer.

He eventually went to college. He even got a job.



GAKUEN KINO

And he would occasionally look back at his writings and fondly recall that day's adventure.

One day, he organized it all into a story.

"Who Will Bell the Hero?"

He titled it thus, and sent it in to a newcomers' writing contest--

He won first place--

He got his story published, and received the adoration of many readers.

On the cover of the novel was a picture of a blue-haired girl with a radiant smile.

In the foreword was written the following:

"I'm so happy to see you again, Bell!"



VOLUME 02

Chapter 5: The Girl With a Thousand Guns ~Role Play~ (Part 1)

[I want you to come with me...]

Kino declared.

They were on the centre of the school gymnasium's stage.

The same old sailor uniform, the same old model gun, and the same old belt with pouches.

The clock on the wall pointed to some hour in the evening. Outside the window, the skies were dyed a beautiful red. It was after school, on a quiet September day.

[...]

Inuyama Wanwan Rikutarou adoringly looked straight into Kino's eyes and smiled softly.

He and Kino were standing a single metre apart from each other.

The same old white shirt and grey pants, the same old shiny white hair.

Inuyama slowly raised his hands to tightly grasp Kino's arm.

"Yes! I would go anywhere with you!"

"STOOOOOP!" Chako-sensei yelled at the top of her lungs.

She was in front of the stage, standing on the gymnasium floor.



GAKUEN KINO

This beautiful woman in her early twenties with white hair and emerald-green eyes was wearing a completely unappealing set of sweats.

As this school had no set gym uniform, it meant that the sweatshirt and sweatpants belonged to the teacher herself. Large letters in kanji on the back of the sweatshirt read 'National Air Force'. Who knows where she could have bought such a thing? Even the author wants to know.

For some reason, Chako-sensei was holding a bamboo sword.

She slammed the floor with it.

Upon closer inspection, the words 'Property of the Kendo Club' were written on the hilt. In other words, this was stolen property.

"Inuyama! Don't change around the dialogue like that! Your line is supposed to be an anxious 'You mean I'm going to have to chase you around everywhere, right?!' He doesn't want to do anything bad, but he's too nice to refuse--that's the kind of characterization you're supposed to be conveying to the audience!" Chako-sensei yelled ferociously.

"Oh... I'm sorry. That was my mistake." Inuyama apologized, as if having just figured this out. His hands were still tightly clasped around Kino's.

"Let go!"

Kino shook him off angrily. She then created some distance between herself and Inuyama.



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"My goodness." Shizu muttered quietly from the side. There were few in this world who were more suited than him to be described as 'calm'.

As usual, Shizu wore a white standing-collar uniform and had a sheathed katana strapped to his belt. A lone dove flew by behind him. In slow motion, at that.

Shizu was holding the script for a play.

The photocopied play's title was 'Allison'¹¹.

"There's not much time left until the Culture Festival! I'm gonna go extra hard on you from now on! I'll make this play a success even if it kills you!" Chako-sensei yelled again.

Twelve days left until the Culture Festival.

Narration: Kino

"The big eater fights another day.

Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino, the Warrior of Justice, the Professional Demon Slayer.

She sees right through evil schemes!

¹¹ *Allison* is another work by Sigsawa Keiichi. Along with the sequel, *Lillia and Treize*, it was adapted into an anime series. The storyline of the play so far is an accurate retelling of the first major story arc of *Allison*.



GAKUEN KINO

She escapes perilous traps!

She bravely duels hideous demons!

What will our death-defying Tough Girl eat today?"

<Dramatis Personae>

- Kino

A female student in her fourth year (first year of high school). The main character of this story.

An extremely normal girl who had learned marksmanship from her grandmother and now attends school wearing a holstered model gun and a belt with pouches containing countless live firearms.

She transforms into the warrior of justice, Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino, and along with her talking cell phone strap Hermes, she fights day and night turning demons who have fallen to temptation back to their human selves.

-Skills:

Marksmanship, eating a lot (before transformation)

Marksmanship, eating a lot (after transformation)

- Hermes

A mysterious talking cell phone strap. A guide of sorts for Kino, having given her the power to transform and fight the demons.



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The only sane man(only sane cell phone strap) in this work. As this story is filled with crazies, the author is having a lot of trouble giving him something to do. Somebody help me.

Sometimes he transforms into a motorcycle to give Kino a ride. Limited to battle situations.

-Skills:

Going to sleep and waking up early

- Shizu

A male student in his sixth year (third year of high school).

Possessed of extremely handsome looks, he is the school's most brilliant and popular student who always carries around a katana.

He is an unflappable and aloof existence, but for some reason, when he is with his underclassman Kino, with whom he has little in common, the background starts getting sparkly?

Shizu's secret identity, however, is the (self-proclaimed) Warrior of Justice, Samoyed Mask.

His ceaseless interruptions during times of demonic invasion have earned him the only spot on Kino's hit list. His greatest fear is Ti, the very sight of whom is enough to shock him into immobility.

-Skills:

Playing innocent (Shizu)

Perversion (Samoyed Mask)

- Inuyama Wanwan Rikutarou



GAKUEN KINO

A male student who transferred from Belgium into Kino's class just before summer break. A prettyboy with long white hair. While not quite at Shizu's level, he's still very popular.

Kino hates him because he sticks around her and follows her all the time. He is also terrifyingly obsessed with Shizu, but it's a mystery as to why. If I say it's a mystery, it *is* a mystery.

-Skills:

Stalking Kino, transforming into a dog

- Detective Wanwan

A mysterious young man with white hair who dresses in black and wears sunglasses. He has mastered the dangerous technique known as the Septuple-Gun Fist Style, which involves dual-wielding guns and even dodging bullets.

He assists Kino and is targeting Samoyed Mask. Is he an enemy or ally? However, he is still a reliable friend to Kino. The background starts getting sparkly when they're together?

- Kuroshima Chako

An English teacher in her early twenties who suddenly started teaching at this school at the beginning of volume 2.

A beautiful, mature woman with white hair and emerald-green eyes who is quite popular with the students.



VOLUME 02

For some reason, she likes Inuyama so much that she leans against his back and puts her chin on his head.

-Skills:

Chattering, getting next to Inuyama and rubbing her cheeks against his hair

- Ti

A mysterious girl who appeared on the battlefield without warning. She is a stoic girl who speaks very little. Appears to be about twelve years old, and has white hair and emerald-green eyes. Doesn't even look at monsters twice, as she plays with grenades like they were marbles.

It seems she might have a past with Samoyed Mask. He is terrified of her. For some reason she always climbs over Detective Wanwan and rubs her cheeks on his hair.

-Skills:

Almost complete silence, grenades, climbing onto Detective Wanwan's back and rubbing her cheeks against his hair

Gakuen Kino Chapter 5: *The Girl with a Thousand Guns*

-Role Playing Game-

"There's not much time left until the Culture Festival! I'm gonna go extra hard on you from now on! I'll make this play a success even if it kills you!"



GAKUEN KINO

It was about one week before the sweatshirt-clad Chako-sensei shouted thus in the gymnasium.

"Ms. Principal! I ask that you make a decision!"

Chako-sensei yelled, wearing a green suit jacket and miniskirt.

Sitting across the luxurious mahogany desk was the 65-year old principal.

She was a woman just beginning her senior years, dressed in grey business wear, wearing round glasses, and having dyed purple hair.

"But you see, Chako-sensei..." the principal trailed off, glancing at the desk.

On the mahogany surface was a single piece of paper.

'Take Action Now Club Proposal Form'

The form, boldly titled thus, listed the name of the club and the proposals regarding its activities, as per school policy.

Extracurricular Club Name: Take Action Now Club

Activities to be Undertaken: A bunch of things that don't overlap with existing club activities. Or a bunch of things that overlap with existing club activities. Decided on a day-by-day basis.

Proposal Submitted by: Kuroshima Chako

Members (min. 3): Kuroshima will take responsibility for recruitment, so this is not an issue.

Supervising Teacher: Kuroshima Chako



VOLUME 02

"The contents of this form are, well..."

It wasn't strange for the principal to be so uncertain. Only a certain kind of principal would unquestioningly put a stamp of approval on a form like this.

"But why? It doesn't break any existing rules! No problems whatsoever!"

"Well, you see..." the principal began, but she went silent.

"..."

Chako-sensei did not speak a word as she took out another set of papers from her pocket.

"What is this?" the principal received the files, confused.

And once she had finished reading--

"Hm? Whaaat?!"

She changed her tune pretty quickly.

It was four minutes later that the principal put her stamp of approval on the application form.

The 'Take Action Now Club' was born.

The next day...



GAKUEN KINO

"...And that's how I started an extracurricular club. I'll explain more about it now."

"Kuroshima-sensei... aren't we in the middle of English class?"

The bespectacled president of Kino's class and the teacher exchanged words.

"Don't worry about it."

"Oh... okay."

The president, who seemed to have given up, did not object any further.

Written on the blackboard in gigantic lettering were the words 'Celebrate the birth of the Take Action Now Club! Join the first wave of new members! Congratulations! Don't forget to add an 's' to pluralize!'.

Meanwhile, Inuyama, sitting right in front of the teacher's podium--

"..."

Was silently reading a completely unrelated book.

For reference, the title of this book was 'Get Started Today! Simple Vengeance that even You can Enact! - Application Version'. It was a very thick volume. From the look of the sheer number of post-its sticking out of the pages, it was also very well-read.

Chako-sensei was balancing her chin on top of Inuyama's head.



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It was now routine in this English class for Inuyama to sit facing the class, acting as chin-rest for Chako-sensei.

Inuyama himself didn't try to resist anymore, either. All he did was turn his desk around before class and work on something else as Chako-sensei taught from the top of his head. After all, being fluent in English, German, French, and Dutch, Inuyama didn't need to learn anything from this class.

"So that's why, according to school regulations, I need at least three members for this club. But the problem is, I don't have three people yet!" said Chako-sensei.

Normally, it would be the *students* that register for a school club and struggle to find a supervisor. In this case, however, it was the total opposite--a supervisor and a club with zero students.

"That's why I decided that all I need to do is gather members myself! A Super Ultra C-Class Solution! Isn't it brilliant?"

You call this brilliant?

Several of the students sighed, but the person chatting up front was entirely unfazed.

"I'm recruiting club members in this class, too! Does anyone want to join? I don't mind if you're already in another club!"

Silence.

Of course, no one answered.



GAKUEN KINO

They didn't particularly dislike the bright and energetic Chako-sensei, but it was too much to just join a club they knew nothing about.

"Hm... that was a surprisingly disappointing reaction... you're all so cruel..." Chako-sensei pouted, still resting her chin on Inuyama's head.

They weren't cruel, just composed and level-headed.

That's what the students all wanted to say, but they backed out.

Kino, being her usual self, sat glassy-eyed at the aisle seat at the very back of the classroom, as if none of this had anything to do with her. Her head was occupied with thoughts of delicious-looking dumplings from a restaurant called *Utsunomiya*, a shop recently featured on TV. And the dumpling statue that was apparently in front of the station.

"Well, that's unfortunate. I have no choice but to abuse my right as a teacher and pick a couple of you to join!" Chako-sensei smiled broadly. She raised her right hand, spun it around a few times, and--

"Ta-da! I choose you!"

Her pointer finger was aimed directly at--

"Huh? Me? Wha-?"

the sleepy-eyed Kino.

"Kino! from now on, you are Member #2 of the honourable Take Action Now Club!"



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"Wha-?!"

Of course, Kino rightly got up off her seat and defended her freedom.

"Wait a second! I don't have time for extracurricular activities!"

Although Kino was not enrolled in any other clubs, it would be difficult for her to juggle her unpredictable responsibilities as a warrior of justice and go to extracurricular activities. Of course, Kino was not particularly partial to the idea of joining such a suspicious club to begin with, but she refrained from saying this so as to keep the atmosphere from descending even further.

"Don't worry about that! You won't have a rigorous schedule like the athletic clubs! Attendance won't always be mandatory."

"..."

Kino now had no choice but to tell the truth.

"Let me be honest, sensei. I don't want to join some club that keeps its activities a secret. I'm sorry, but I'll have to decline."

"Oh... why couldn't you just join since I picked you out? It's an extracurricular club in name, but we're just going to be doing this and that and have a fun time together. Well, Member #2?"

"Who are you calling #2?" Kino asked, and suddenly thought of something.

"Wait... if I'm #2, then does that mean someone else has already joined?"



GAKUEN KINO

"Yep!"

"Who?" Kino asked out of curiosity. What kind of weirdo could have joined such a suspicious club?

"Who? Well, he's a sixth-year student. I ran into him in the hallway yesterday as soon as I created the club, and asked him, 'Lookin' good, bro. Wanna join the Take Action Now Club?'. He said yes immediately."

"Oh... I see..."

Kino was now even more vehemently opposed to joining a club with a weirdo like this student, and was about to voice her thoughts--

"His name is Shizu, and he carries around a katana."

A small commotion swept over the classroom. The most popular guy in school, the Prettyboy Samurai! Shizu, the Katana Nobleman, was in a suspicious club like this? Everyone had thought that Shizu would remain a cold lone wolf who refrained from join any clubs.

"Member #1 is Shizu, and #2 is Kino."

"..."

Kino hesitated for a moment.

The other students continued to chatter.

"Extracurricular activities with Shizu-senpai... sounds nice, but the club name's a little suspicious..."



VOLUME 02

"I'm kinda jealous... but a club led by Chako-sensei?"

The students gossiped.

"..."

Kino silently fell into doubt.

Shizu-senpai, after all, was a kind gentleman who defended her from Inuyama, and was most definitely not a bad person.

"Then it's decided! Kino will be Member #2. You may only voice your objections in the next five seconds. 54321-!" she began counting down and finished in an instant.

In the end, Kino could not escape. She was now Member #2.

"You okay, Kino?" Hermes asked, quietly enough so that only Kino could hear.

"Oh. Well, yeah! I guess it couldn't hurt to have fun, right? Even a warrior of justice needs to take a breather every now and then. Yeah, that's right."

"That so? Don't say I didn't warn you." Hermes said coolly.

Chako-sensei raised her voice in excitement.

"Looks like I have two members now. As for the third one..."

"I would like to join!"



GAKUEN KINO

The sudden declaration had come from the teacher's chin-rest, Inuyama. There had been a glint in his eye the moment he had heard the name 'Shizu', and Inuyama set his book aside as he made known his desire to join the club.

"Great! Good for you! Inuyama is now officially Member #3! All right! I've finally collected my students!"

Chako-sensei looked really happy, judging from the way she was rubbing her chin on Inuyama's head.

"Ack! Wait! If Inuyama's joining, I don't—" Kino began to argue, and at the same time--

"Sensei! I (we) want to join too!" the other female students simultaneously offered themselves for membership despite the unusual nature of the club, all for Shizu and Inuyama.

"Sorry, everyone! I want to start things off with as small a group as possible. This is the end of the first recruitment session!" Chako-sensei's energetic voice dashed the hopes of many students.

The girls sighed.

"..."

Kino sat in the back, dazed and lost for words.

"Don't say I didn't warn you." Hermes repeated coolly.

That day, after school.



VOLUME 02

The Take Action Now Club held its first official meeting.

The location was the library, today's designated meeting place.

It's quite shocking that a place that should be reserved for students who wish to study could be forcefully re-appropriated by a tiny club that had just been founded. What could have Chako-sensei shown the principal to gain such influence?

If someone who didn't know about the current situation were to open the library doors, they would be greeted by a surprising sight. Through the library doors was a Host Club--I mean, the Take Action Now Club.

Of course, a note saying, 'Take Action Now Club Meeting in Progress. Do Not Disturb.' was posted on the library door.

They had taken the table in the centre of the library, in front of the counter. Kino sat in the middle, with the calm Shizu on her left and the bloodthirsty Inuyama on her right.

Standing in front of the counter was the supervisor and founder of this strange and suspicious club, Chako-sensei.

"I hereby announce the first official meeting of our honourable club!" Chako-sensei began. Kino immediately raised her hand.

"Yes, #2?"

"...Am I stuck with that name...? Anyway, I have a question. What does this club do, exactly?"



GAKUEN KINO

"What do we do? That's easy. We all have a fun, wonderful time together and create precious, heart-racing memories of our fleeting youth. Who's the one being all wishy-washy here?"

"Wait. So... specifically...?"

"Oh! I bet you're anxious, Kino! I understand completely. The only girl surrounded by a couple of handsome boys! But don't worry. I won't keep you too late after school. Even if you have to stay until later, I'll lie for you and tell the dormitory caretakers that I'm staying with you!"

Kino could not bring herself to say 'No, wait a second'.

Chako-sensei continued nonchalantly, sparing no thought for Kino's feelings.

"I've already picked out a project for us! There's no need to panic."

"What kind of project?"

"Well... that's..." Chako-sensei trailed off.

"What is it? Hurry up and tell us, please." Kino asked. She questioned mercilessly.

A droplet of sweat ran down Chako-sensei's face.

"If you haven't decided on something, I'd like to leave this club--" just as Kino was getting up to leave, however--

"Wait! This! This is our project!"



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Chako-sensei had grabbed one of the books that had been stacked in the returns bin beside the counter. It was Dengeki Bunko #644, ISBN 4-8402-2060-3.

Shizu glanced, Kino cocked her head, and Inuyama narrowed his eyes at the book Chako-sensei was holding.

The cover featured a girl with blond hair and blue eyes, wearing a leather pilot's jacket. The title was--

'Allison'

Chako-sensei raised the book into the air.

"So what about this book?" Kino asked coldly.

"Huh? Oh... well..." Chako-sensei began panicking.

"Um... you see..."

And about four seconds of awkward mumbling later--

"A play! That's right, we'll put on a play together! At the upcoming Culture Festival!"

"Sensei... I have a question..."

"What is it, Kino?"

"Why a play...?"

"That's a good question. It's because this school doesn't have a performing arts club. If our elite, brand-spanking new club were to do something that overlapped with another club, we'd end up



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discouraging the other clubs, right? We can't do something so mean."

"Sensei... I have a question..."

"What is it, Kino?"

"Do you have any experience in theatre or directing plays...?"

"Nope! But that's only a detail as minuscule as a paramecium. Our Take Action Now Club has three mottos! First, don't be afraid to try new things! Second, take action as soon as you think of something! Third, believe in our own possibilities! Fourth, nothing is impossible when you trust your teammates. Fifth, don't let other people's opinions sway you. Oh! Sorry, there's actually five mottos. Five!"

"Sensei... I have a question..."

"What is it, Kino?"

"Can I leave now?"

"No. Now, let me pick out your roles. Kino will be playing the role of our heroine, Allison! Inuyama will play her childhood friend and crush, a boy named Wil! And Shizu will be Benedict, Wil's rival in love--a pilot from an enemy country who flirts with Allison. I want you to finish reading this novel by tomorrow. Dismissed!"

The story finally returns to the gymnasium.



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[Yeah... let's go together...] Kino recited in monotone with a stony face, completely removed from the emotion of the scene. As a side note, everything inside []s are lines from the script.

Kino unwillingly reached out towards Inuyama's face.

[Yeah...]

Inuyama took her hand and smiled brightly.

"I would follow you into the depths of Hell!"

"NO--!"

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Chako-sensei's bamboo sword smacked the ground.

"Wil's line is supposed to be 'But don't do anything rash'! How many times do I have to tell you, Inuyama? Stop changing around your lines!"

"Please excuse me. I just had difficulty suppressing my love for Kino..." Inuyama replied with a straight face.

"Arghhh..." Kino frowned, turning away.

But the criticism hit Kino next.

"And as for you, Kino, try to be a little more bittersweet! Do you understand? The character of Allison is Wil's childhood friend, but they're living far apart now and she's desperate to make her feelings known to him! Because she's a pilot, she could die at any time in battle or an accident. That's why she's trying so hard to tell



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"Wil her feelings, but she can't bring herself to be honest! Everything she does goes over his head! You have to convey this girl's feelings to the audience!" Chako-sensei lectured. Kino, however, was not convinced.

"I don't think it's possible. Three reasons. Number one, I've never acted before. Number two, I'm supposed to act like this towards *Inuyama*. Sorry, I only had two reasons. But the second reason is good enough for two." Kino said stoically, and Inuyama grasped his head with a "That's so mean, Kino".

"I conveyed my feelings to you, right? Could you sign now?"

"The customer you are trying to reach is unavailable at this time. Please try again later."

"No way..."

As Kino and Chako-sensei make up situational gags--

"Sensei. May I try my hand at a scene as well?" Shizu asked.

"Well..."

Chako-sensei fell into thought. She had planned for an intensive practice session for the scenes with Benedict, but she shrugged it off and agreed to Shizu's proposal.

"Inuyama, switch out with Shizu."

"But sensei! I can do it! I can play the part of Wil!"

"Never mind, just switch!"



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Inuyama reluctantly walked off the stage. Shizu lightly made his way atop the platform and placed his script on the floor.

"Let's do our best, Kino."

He encouraged her with a cool, gentle smile.

"Oh, yes. Right."

Kino quickly bowed to him. Inuyama looked at them with an openly sour expression.

"Okay! Scene 12, a flashback to their first meeting! Begin!"

Chako-sensei ordered. Kino rushed to pick up her script off the floor and turned to scene 12.

Shizu took a step towards Kino with an ever-calm expression. He then said dandily:

[Excuse me, would you happen to be the daughter of Colonel Rosemeitz?]

Shizu's acting skills were undeniably top-notch. He had become the handsome, flirtatious, and slightly wily enemy pilot, Benedict. He was perfect. There could be no better actor to play this role.

"Um..." Kino mumbled quietly, and hurriedly read her line from the script.

[No, I'm a pilot.]

She really *did* read her line. Textbook recitation. A textbook recitation of a textbook reading.



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[My apologies! Your Bezelese is as perfect as you are beautiful. Perhaps I could apologize for this mistake by treating you to a cup of tea. I'm sure it will warm you up immensely.]

Shizu, meanwhile, was on a roll. His perfectly balanced and emotional acting was Oscar-grade.

"..."

Hearing this from the extremely handsome Shizu, Kino's heart was slightly--actually, it was all-out racing.

"Um... [Just a cup, then]." she managed to read her line, despite being flustered.

"Stop! Shizu, that was excellent!"

Chako-sensei praised him.

"..."

Inuyama was quietly glaring at Shizu with a sour expression, from under Chako-sensei's chin. Looks like Chako-sensei hasn't forgotten to hug him from behind. She then began to criticize Kino.

"Kino! You can't act so smitten! Allison's not interested in Benedict at all!"

"W-who are you calling s-smitten?!" Kino denied the accusation. But she was stuttering a bit too much for it to have any effect.

Shizu was as calm and composed as always, flicking his hair.



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"Not good... how are we going to finish practicing for next week's Culture Festival with our heroine Allison looking like this...?"

"That's why I said from the start, this is impossible!" Kino raised her voice. "It's not too late! Can't we try something else? Oh yeah! How about a yakisoba booth? I can make really good yakisoba, you know? My grandma taught me herself! I can do everything but the seasoning! So please? Please?" Kino argued on the stage. There was more emotion in this small argument than the entirety of her acting today.

"I really need a Super Ultra C-Class Solution this time... What should I do?"

Chako-sensei, however, was not listening at all. She was lost deep in thought with her chin resting on Inuyama's head.

"I got it!" She looked up suddenly, shouting happily.

Inuyama looked up at her from under her head, and Shizu and Kino gave her their full attention from atop the stage.

Chako-sensei's solution was--

"We'll have a *Genepro*!"

"What's a *Genepro*?" Kino asked.

"*Genepro*..."

The original word is *Generalprobe*. It is a loanword from German that has been shortened into *Genepro* in the Japanese language. It is a rehearsal that goes through the entirety of the work, from



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beginning to end. Also known as a Dress Rehearsal." Shizu replied with his seemingly infinite supply of trivial knowledge.

"Yeah, that's what it is!" Chako-sensei agreed. "We'll run through the entire play as a dress rehearsal next Monday after school! We'll show it to an audience of students and get some feedback from them."

"Wait a second!"

"Kino! I can't just leave things the way they are now! As a lioness drops her cubs from a cliff, I'll give you a difficult assignment to challenge you and spur growth! For a new future! For Meteorology! Uh... in any case, let's give it a go!"

Chako-sensei was as unpersuasive as usual. Kino sighed.

"That sounds like a good idea." Shizu agreed suddenly. '*What?*' Kino stared at Shizu, jaw on the floor.

"I believe it will be a good way to gain more hands-on experience. Rehearsing on our own, we are cut off from the anxiety and stress that will be upon us in a live performance. A dress rehearsal will give us ample training for the final performance." Shizu spoke like a true honour student, almost disgustingly calm.

Inuyama, still under Chako-sensei's chin, added to this.

"That's a good idea. I'm also in agreement. If we can finish this without any interruptions, I'm sure we will be able to improve for the real performance." there was a great deal of bloodlust radiating from the words 'without any interruptions'. Shizu was as stoic as ever, perhaps not even noticing.



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"Then it's decided!" Chako-sensei concluded quickly. Kino, taken aback, complained.

"W-wait a second! What about *my* opinion? I'm against this--it's impossible! We haven't even memorized the script yet!"

"You just have to memorize it by Monday. You have Saturday and Sunday--two whole days!"

"That's not possible!" Kino replied, holding up the relatively thick script. The play was two hours long, and the heroine Allison had many, many lines.

"Oh, is it? What about you two? Shizu?" Chako-sensei asked condescendingly.

"I've already finished memorizing." Shizu answered firmly.

Inuyama followed up with his own answer.

"I'm almost finished. Two days are more than enough time."

Kino, who hated to lose, was slightly aggravated.

"It's still not possible! --I'm quitting this play, sensei! And I'm quitting this club, too! A lot of people want to join now, so there shouldn't be a problem with membership!"

Kino flat-out declared her feelings on the matter. After all, Chako-sensei seemed ready to drag her around if she didn't draw the line somewhere. Kino had raised the flag of rebellion.

Kino expected that Chako-sensei would resort to another stupid and illogical explanation to reject her cause. However--



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"Is that so? That's too bad."

Surprisingly, Chako-sensei seemed to be taking it quite well. However, just as Kino saw her glint of hope--

"I was going to offer this as a reward after the performance..."

Chako-sensei produced from her pocket a single ticket. Chinese characters were written on the shiny golden piece of paper.

The three students looked at this scrap.

"Oh! Th-that'saaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

The one who reacted like sodium in water was, of course, Kino.

Chako-sensei smiled.

"What about that piece of paper?" Hermes asked Kino quietly. Kino's followed up with something that was more of an excited rant than a reply.

"Th-that's... a free full-course meal ticket to the ridiculously popular five-star Chinese restaurant that just opened shop in front of the station! They gave out ten of those awesome tickets through a lottery when the shop opened! Free food and infinite refills at this restaurant that's been booked completely for the next year! The legendary Platinum Ticket that lets you eat at the VIP room without making a reservation!"

Kino worked herself into a frenzy.

"More food?" Hermes was dumbstruck.

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"It certainly is delicious! I knew you'd appreciate it, Kino! As I expected from the girl who's conquered every single restaurant in the station area!"

"Huh?! How'd you know about that, sensei-"

"That doesn't matter. Also, I obtained this ticket through individual means. It's definitely authentic, and only valid until next Monday. One ticket will admit up to four guests."

Gulp. Kino swallowed. The sound echoed throughout the gym like a gunshot.

"S-sensei... I-I'm actually n-not doing anything M-Monday night..." Kino spoke, voice trembling.

Chako-sensei's reply was nonchalant.

"What a coincidence. Neither am I..."

"Th-then-"

"Well... it'd be a waste to just let it expire, so I'm planning to go on Monday. This place has top-notch food in general, but their pork dumplings are supposed to be the cream of the crop. Anyone who's taken a bite is enchanted by its taste! It was on that TV special the other day, too."

"Th-th-th-th-th-then..."

"I don't have a boyfriend to go with or anything... so why don't we all go as a club after the dress rehearsal? Sound good?"



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Da-dun! (sfx) Had Kino ever been this shocked in her entire life?
No. Not once.

"Oh? Would that be all right with you, Kuroshima-sensei?" Shizu asked.

"Of course! You deserve it for practicing so hard. We'll go together."

"Am I included as well?"

"You bet! You're an important member too, Inuyama. Let's go together. I'll feed you myself."

Kino ground her teeth as she listened to Chako-sensei overtly provoking her. Her teeth would give away any second now. Oh! They've begun cracking.

"Sensei..." Kino began reluctantly.

"I won't abandon my duty in the middle of practice! I'll finish my job perfectly until the end! Dress rehearsal? Memorization? That's all a piece of cake! There's no way I couldn't do that!" she spat quickly, steam escaping her nostrils.

"Really? That's wonderful! I don't think we'll be able to find anyone as talented as you, Kino. Then Monday after school it is!"

"Yeah! And after that?"

"The four of us go out for dinner together with the ticket. Well then, today's practice is over!" Chako-sensei announced the end of the session, waving the ticket in the air.



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Kino walked down the hill towards the dormitory, the streets illuminated by the setting sun.

Shizu had returned home on his own and Inuyama was still being held hostage by Chako-sensei.

"Are you sure you can memorize it all by Monday, Kino?" Hermes asked quietly, so as to not be heard by the occasional passing student. Kino's answer was immediate.

"No way! Who'd be able to do that? Who do you think I am, Hermes?"

"Don't say something so weak with such a confident voice! What are you thinking?"

"I have *you*, Hermes! Everything will be fine as long as you memorize it and tell me the lines quietly!"

"So... you're cheating? Isn't that kind of underhanded?"

"If I get it done, I'll get to eat at a five-star Chinese restaurant! I can eat pork dumplings! I'm sure that's a completely valid excuse!"

"Riiight..."

Two days passed by in a flash. It was Monday.

The Take Action Now Club's first dress rehearsal would begin.



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"That's quite the turnout."

Chako-sensei was looking at the audience from the curtained side area beside the stage.

Chairs had been set up in the gymnasium, and while it was not nearly the entirety of the student body, a fair number of students had gathered to watch. There were students even on the second floor, which was usually reserved for watching sporting events.

They had all come to watch the dress rehearsal of the Take Action Now Club's performance of *Allison*. However, the crowd was overwhelmingly female in composition. The rest were male students and several teachers, including the principal.

Actually, posters had been put up in the halls this morning, guerrilla-style.

At the bottom of the poster were the words 'Celebrating the founding of the Take Action Now Club! An open dress rehearsal of the club's first activity! Come to the gym after school.'

Added in excited font were the words, 'Free entry!'.

'Title: Allison. Original Story by: A Gun Otaku. Producer, Director and et cetera: Kuroshima Chako. Sponsored by the Government of Japan.'

Above the text were pictures of the three actors.

In the bottom right corner was a small photo of Kino. Her head was cast down to her right and she had a serious expression on her face. Under the picture was a caption labelling the actress Kino as



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the character of Allison, and one of her quotes from the play: 'That's one heck of a cannon.'.

On the left side of the poster was Inuyama's pretty face, looking up towards the right side of the poster with a bittersweet smile. It was much larger than Kino's picture. Beside him was the caption identifying Inuyama as Wil, and his quote: 'I can't let it go... I won't let things change...'.

On the right was the cool and handsome Shizu, looking down with a melancholy expression at the left side of the poster--in other words, towards Inuyama. The caption beside him identified him as Benedict, and the quote was 'Let's get married. May the Heavens give their blessings for all eternity...'.

What an incredible poster.

Anyone who knew nothing about the original work would likely mistake this for a story of forbidden love between Inuyama and Shizu. Allison's quote almost read like a piece of sexual harassment.

Of course, Chako-sensei was behind the creation of this poster. The pictures were, just to add, all taken secretly and photoshopped. She knew a lot about advertising, this woman--move over Goebbels! Kuroshima is in town!

The poster was the reason for the overwhelming female audience. None of them really cared about the play's contents or quality--they just wanted to watch Shizu-senpai and Inuyama. But the large turnout was enough for an attempt to justify the club's existence to the principal.

As a side note, many of these posters were stolen. Students had been taking them when no one was watching. Chako-sensei merely



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smiled and put up more posters when they had disappeared. Several times she caught female students stealing posters, and each time she had said, "I can't give you the poster... but what can I do but put up more when they get stolen?", covertly encouraging such behaviour.

"This is wonderful, everyone! So many people are here to watch the fruits of our efforts!" Chako-sensei exclaimed as she turned back to look at Kino, Inuyama, and Shizu preparing to go on stage.

Chako-sensei was dressed very strangely today.

Normally she would be wearing a sweatshirt and sweatpants or a business suit with a miniskirt, but right now she was clad in a black dress. She was also wearing a long, curly black wig that covered her left eye.

"Have you steeled yourselves?"

She was talking a little weirdly, too, but the trio was too used to the teacher's unusual ways to feel a need to point this out.

"Kino... you're a pretty terrifying person." said Chako-sensei.

"I haven't even done anything yet." Kino responded.

As a side note, all three of the actors were still in their uniforms. (plus model gun and katana). Maybe they couldn't afford costumes.

Atop the stage and beside it were a sidecar made with a desk and some plywood, and a picture of a biplane cockpit.

The setting would all be taken care of with these props, the multicoloured stage lights, the screens set up behind the stage,



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and Chako-sensei's narration. They would be projecting images of skies, a school in the forest, and a cavern.

The ones that had been preparing these amazing stage setups since yesterday and were now working with the lights and the sound systems were a group of people in black.

Not only were they dressed in black, they also covered their faces with black pieces of cloth. They were working hard as Chako-sensei belted out orders.

Kino and the other students were very curious as to who these quiet, mysterious labourers in black could be, but Chako sensei merely replied, "It's a secret.", and winked. Their identities would remain a mysterious mystery.

Of course, no one noticed the fact that these people in black were actually wearing combat suits underneath and carrying black Smith & Wesson Model 5906s, loaded with live ammo, at their sides.

'Sponsored by the Government of Japan' was not a lie. This is, dear readers, where your tax money is being spent.

The time had finally come.

It was the moment of truth--the performance was about to begin.

"Let's get started! For the Take Action Now Club's first official activity!" said Chako-sensei, flapping her dress. She then punched the air with her fist.

"Now repeat after me! All for One and One for the Take Action Now Club!"



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Three fists punched the air! Oh, our glorious trio!

"For the Take Action Now Club!"

"For the Take Action Now Club!"

"For the pork dumplings!"

Someone was off by a few words. I'm sure you all know who it was.

A bell rang to signal the start of the play.

The curtains closed over the windows, and the gymnasium was reduced to half its original brightness.

The spotlights then turned on.

A classical piano piece played as background music. Chako-sensei had asked the middle-aged lady who taught music to compose a piece ahead of time, and recorded it. In return, she had handed over a collection of photos of Shizu taken in secret. Of course, this is top secret.

[This is a story of another planet... On this planet was a single, potato-shaped continent. On each side of the landmass was a country. Both nations claimed that they were the origin of the human race, and had been waging countless wars over this argument from time immemorial. It had been thirty-five years since another such war had taken many lives, and the two countries had been in a cold war ever since.] Chako-sensei narrated clearly.



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The narration, of course, was all pre-recorded and being played from a computer. The helpers in black would simply play the right file at the right time.

[On the east was the Roxcheanuk Confederation, shortened to Roxche. On the west was the Allied Kingdoms of Bezel-Iltoa, also known as Sou Beil.]

The stage lights dimmed slightly and a very detailed map was projected onto the screen. It identified the mountain range and the Lutoni river that bisected the continent.

It was now time for the players. Inuyama stepped onto the stage.

The audience squealed restlessly as the prettyboy stepped up, long hair fluttering. Inuyama didn't even react as he opened up a prop book and took a seat on a chair.

[My name is Wil. Wilhelm Schultz. I'm a sixteen-year old student at a school near the Roxche border. The summer break of the year 3287 had just begun, and I was reading alone on the school grounds. The early summer skies were a beautiful blue, the breeze was refreshingly cool, and the sun shone warmly through the trees.]

Inuyama, monologued magnificently in a clear voice. The lights gave off the appearance of warm summer sunlight.

The female students watched all of this in sheer euphoria.

"Inuyama! You're so C-O-O-L!" some of them screamed.



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[I could never have imagined back then... that over the next three days, I would go on an amazing adventure closely intertwined with the history of the world and discover something unbelievable.]

Kino was watching Inuyama's emotional face from the side.

"What can that bastard *not* do...?"

She was quite angry. Actually, Kino was rather furious because Inuyama's acting was very good, even to her biased eyes.

Standing behind her, Shizu gave Kino a pat on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, Kino. I'm sure you'll do just fine."

"Y-you think so? I left my lines to Hermes--I mean, I only just managed to memorize my lines."

"That doesn't matter. You have the greatest concentration of the three of us, Kino. I promise you, the skills you honed while training under that grandmother of yours will not fail you. I've been watching you all this time, after all." Shizu said calmly.

"..."

Kino blushed in the dimly-lit backstage area. '*Go somewhere else if you're going to act sickeningly sweet.*' Hermes thought. Of course, he didn't voice this idea.

"I have faith in your abilities. Let's do our best to make this play a success."

"Well, that's..."



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Kino *had* to make the play a success, all for the sake of her pork dumplings. Shizu continued with a melancholy look, oblivious to Kino's hungry motivations.

"Until now, I've been enjoying my life of solitude. But ever since I met you, Inuyama, and Chako-sensei, and joined this club, I've been learning how wonderful it is to work together as a team. I'm very thankful."

The handsome Shizu was saying this in the dark, face-to-face with Kino. Think about it. How would *that* feel?

"...um..."

Kino's heart was racing. It was about equal to the speed of an Ingram MAC-11 submachine gun. Anyone who actually understood this metaphor has the same problems as Sigsawa.

The sound of a biplane's engines filled the stage. Inuyama turned around in surprise and looked into the sky, putting down his book.

Projected onto the screen was a piece of footage showing a biplane flying in the air. It was stolen from a movie, but altered so it would be impossible to recognize the source. Please don't try this at home.

[The biplane that flew over to the school... a crest with the Spear of Sellon, the symbol of the Roxche military, was emblazoned on it.]

There was a close-up of the spear, and Chako-sensei's narration exposition.

[Wait... that can't be... can it?...] Inuyama asked as he look into the sky. *WHOOSH!* Something zoomed from right to left, and



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Inuyama's eyes followed the sound. He performed as if he was really looking up at a plane in the air.

"You're up. Do your best. I believe in you."

"Thank you. I will!" Kino replied energetically. And three seconds after the engine sound effect was replaced by the sound of a plane landing--

[The air force pilot who disembarked the biplane that descended upon the school without warning was a young girl.]

Kino stepped onto the stage in line with Chako-sensei's narration.

[It's been a while, Wil. How've you been?]

Kino's acting was slightly awkward in comparison to a professional, but it was quite a performance for a complete beginner like her.

"Excellent. Looks like I'll have to work hard as well."

Shizu muttered with a smile as he watched Kino.

The play continued on smoothly, thanks to the club's most focused member Kino(who was cheating off Hermes) and the talented Inuyama.

To summarize:

Allison, on leave from duty, visited Wil, who was also off on summer vacation, for the first time in a long time. They went to



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the city outskirts together, where they encountered a strange old man.

The old man told them that he knew of a treasure that could end the war between the two nations. Of course, the old man was a famed teller of extremely tall tales, and it was difficult for either Allison or Wil to believe them.

However, the old man was suddenly kidnapped by a mysterious group of men right in front of their eyes. What could they do?

As a side note, the old man was a piece of plywood. His lines were recorded beforehand by Chako-sensei and pitched down. The kidnapping sequence was orchestrated by having a man in black pick up the piece of plywood and leave, carrying it under his arm. It was overwhelmingly low-budget. There was laughter from the audience.

Allison and Wil followed the kidnappers to an airfield and watched them take off on a plane. They gave chase by stealing a biplane that happened to be there. This kind of action is normally known as 'theft'.

Allison sat in the front and Wil behind her as they flew through the night. However, as they gave chase, they ended up crossing the border at the Lutoni river. This was not good. They were shot down by a fighter plane piloted by Benedict, played by Shizu, and crashed on enemy territory.

Not only did they lose the old man, Wil was also injured and knocked unconscious by the impact of the landing.

So Allison opted to carry Wil on her back as she walked alone through the field.



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[Hyah!]

Kino recited Allison's line as she hoisted Wil onto her back, intending to walk it alone.

[There. Enjoy your piggyback.]

Actually, she didn't hoist him onto his back. Kino dragged him away by the feet like a corpse, all the way offstage.

The female students who were not so keen on seeing Kino get too close to Inuyama applauded. The reactions so far have been quite positive.

"That was an ad-lib, too... Kino, you're a pretty terrifying person..."

Looks like Chako-sensei really liked this line.

It was now time for her to take the stage.

Allison had found a house on the field. It was inhabited by an elderly woman who had lost her family in the war.

Chako-sensei, in the role of the old woman, appeared in her black dress and wig.

[Who are you...?]

It was a bold performance.

Allison, taken by surprise at the old woman's appearance, drew her handgun (note: a prop gun. It would be very dangerous for Kino to do this with a real firearm) and aimed at the old woman.



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And the lights dimmed in the middle of this climactic scene.

[Allison and Wil have been discovered by an enemy civilian! Oh, what will they do next? Act 2 will begin after a fifteen-minute intermission! Shizu, playing the role of Benedict, will get a lot of stage time, too! Don't miss it!]

Chako-sensei's pre-recorded voice announced the intermission.

It had been about an hour since the beginning of the play. Most of the audience members remained where they were, and seemed to have enjoyed the play so far. There was a huge round of applause.

The gymnasium lights came back on. The students excitedly chatted about the play or took the time for a bathroom break. Even the principal and the other teachers were talking about the play.

"I was hesitant to see how this would turn out... but it's quite good. It was excellent, considering the number of members."

"I agree. Maybe we could consider giving them a spot at the Culture Festival."

"Whew! Halfway there!"

"That was great! But that was mean of you to drag me by the feet, Kino."

"You two were excellent. Let's keep this up for Act 2. Together, we can do it."



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Backstage, Kino, Inuyama, and Shizu were chatting and taking a well-deserved breather.

"Yeah, you guys did really well." Chako-sensei nodded. And immediately afterwards, she suddenly began coughing and squeezed out a dramatic line.

"Why now... must my life be extinguished so...?"

But the trio wasn't listening at all. In fact, they were looking in another direction altogether.

"Oh, fine!" Chako-sensei straightened her back. She was as healthy as ever.

Meanwhile--

"Fufu... It's halfway finished."

Hermes was still hanging from Kino's belt, silently in thought.

'I was worried there would be another demon attack... maybe at this rate, the play'll end properly without getting interrupted.'

And so let me remind you--

This novel is called Gakuen Kino.

A student sat in the boys' bathroom, a little ways away from the gymnasium.



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Of course, he was male. He was in fifth year--his second year of high school.

While embarrassed, he sat in the front row among the girls who had come to ogle Shizu and Inuyama and gave his full attention to Act 1.

That's right, in reality, he had been smitten with Shizu-I mean, Inuyama-I mean--

"Oh... Chako-sensei..."

He held completely wholesome affections for Chako-sensei. It was all-out love.

"What an amazing woman..."

He had a blissful expression, sitting on the toilet with his pants and boxers down. He looked like an idiot.

As a side note, he had already finished his business. All he had to do now was put on his boxers and his pants and flush the toilet.

"Chako-sensei, oh, Chako-sensei. Chako-sensei."

It was a poetry recital from the depths of his heart.

He loved Chako-sensei. He loved her very much.

A charming lady with white hair and green eyes who appeared out of nowhere his term. She was the explosively popular talk of the school.



GAKUEN KINO

She did, on occasion, display strange behaviours such as attacking and hugging Inuyama, but she was a good person who treated all students equally and fairly. She was a respectable lady.

"I wish I had a girlfriend like her..."

Age wasn't a factor. Love is everything.

As a side note, while he wasn't as popular as Shizu, this student was also quite handsome and popular with girls. He was also a talented karate club member and a dashing athlete who received the adoration of many younger female students.

However--

"Oh, Chako-sensei... my love..."

None of those female students could possibly know that this young man was hugging himself, writhing in ecstasy, and mumbling like an idiot, all in a deserted washroom.

"Oh..."

It was almost time for Act 2 to begin. He had just raised his head to set out to engrave Chako-sensei's lovely form into his thoughts and sighed at his love that was not meant to be.

Then he saw it.

"There's a way to make Chako-sensei your girlfriend! Look to your right."

Dozens of centimetres in front of his eyes--in other words, written on the stall door--were written these words. Of course, these



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letters were definitely not there when he first sat on the toilet, or even until just after that.

"Whoa..."

Reading Chako-sensei's name, he wavered for a single moment. He desperately calmed himself and looked to his right.

"You just have to become the same age as her! Isn't it simple? Next, look to your ←left."

This was written on the partition to his right. He frowned and turned left.

"You think it's impossible? Not so! Anything is possible if you try hard enough! The next hint is ↑ up here."

He slowly raised his head.

"A simple contract will do the trick! You just have to express your 'agreement'! A magical power will turn you into a big, strong man! I bet Chako-sensei won't be able to resist your charms! What do you say?"

"... I see... so this is it..."

The young man did not lose his cool, even after reading these strange scribbles.

"So this is the so-called 'Demonic Temptation'!"

Correct!



GAKUEN KINO

This was the temptation of evil. In Japanese, kore wa Demonic Temptation.

Many were the students in this school who had fallen for these wily, ever-changing temptations. This was why the school had taken every precaution to instil a sense of vigilance among the student body. Of course, the sheer number of students falling for it regardless is probably a hallmark of their youth.

"You think I'd fall for something so simple?!" he answered, getting indignant.

He then got off the toilet, pulled up his boxers and pants, zipped up, and put on his belt.

"You've picked the wrong guy to mess with." he grinned, and pushed down the lever to flush the toilet.

And as he usually did, he closed the toilet cover with his left hand. This action was carved into his mind by his two younger sisters, who would always complain to him that 'it's only courteous to close the lid once you finish'.

And as he heard the sound of the toilet flushing--

he caught sight of a series of letters.

Written in clear font on the back of the toilet cover were the following words.

"If you agree, please operate the toilet lever. Thank you for your patronage, and we hope you enjoy your time as a demon."

"That was a cheap shot!" He screamed, but it was too late.



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Looks like we have our demon of the day.

Gakuen Kino is taking suggestions for methods of demonic temptation.

If you're thinking, "What about something like this? Maybe I'd fall for a temptation like this one? I bet no one could resist this one!".

If you have a great idea for a method of temptation, rub a balloon against your clothes and put it to your head.

[Act 2 is about to begin. Please return to your seats.]

Chako-sensei's narration began. Students began filling the gymnasium again.

Most people who had watched Act 1 had remained behind. There were some new faces in the audience, as well. It seemed that some positive word-of-mouth had spread to students who were in the middle of club activities. Some students were still in athletic wear. It was a full house.

Backstage.

"Just until I get my pork dumplings..." Kino told herself as she sat on a chair.



GAKUEN KINO

"Half the play left to find an opening to kill him..." Inuyama, a little ways away, mumbled as he sat rest omitted.

And a slight distance away,

"..." Shizu was in quiet meditation.

"Shall we begin?" Asked the teacher in the black dress.

"Yeah."

"Yes."

Kino and Inuyama got off their seats.



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Chapter 5: The Girl With a Thousand Guns ~Role Play~ (Part 2)

Act 2 finally began.

Allison and Wil had run into a Sou Beil woman named Ladia. Wil received treatment for his thankfully minor injuries.

However, the woman, having lost her family in the war, treated Allison coldly.

Chako-sensei, in the role of Ladia, gave a standout performance that resonated with the audience. After finally coming to trust Allison and Wil, she assisted them as they set out to rescue the old man.

They headed to a small base nearby, dressed up as their own enemies. The old man was being held there, and--

[Nice to meet you. My name is Carr Benedict.]

A handsome enemy pilot named Benedict was also there for some secret training. He flirted with women from the enemy's military. He was a skirtchaser.

Shizu's presence was overwhelming.

Wearing a real sword at his side, he complimented the plywood lady with utmost seriousness.

[Why don't we go out for tea sometime?]



GAKUEN KINO

A collective sigh could be heard from the female students in their seats, with the occasional response of 'I'd go anywhere with you'.

And Chako-sensei's impossible greed was fuelled as she watched from offstage.

"Good going, Shizu. You're quite useful. Maybe I should sign him up for an idol audition..."

Meanwhile--

"..."

Kino was at the opposite end of the backstage area, watching Shizu in awe.

"Is he that admirable to you?"

"Huh?"

Kino turned around, surprised by the voice. Inuyama was in the shadows, watching Kino, and Shizu, who was on the brightly lit stage.

He looked at Kino with sad eyes that spoke of repressed anger and hatred. It was quite indescribable. Inuyama had the look of an abandoned puppy.

Kino, while surprised by his unusual tone of voice, answered him coolly.

"W-well... yeah. Who wouldn't think so?"

It was a cold response.



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Inuyama quietly nodded in half-agreement.

[The men of my country do not hit on other men. This goes doubly so for ugly ones.]

Shizu spoke, and the female students laughed. People cheered restlessly.

"But say... hypothetically speaking..." Inuyama continued quietly.
"What if that man standing in the spotlight--that man who has the adoration of everyone--what if all that is just a mask? What would you think then?"

"Huh?"

Kino cocked her head, taken by surprise at this strange question.

"What if he's just wearing a mask? Shamelessly using a mask of kindness and benevolence... If he's hiding his ignoble true self with a mask as pristine as snow... If he was actually a shameless animal in human form!" Inuyama continued, his voice rising steadily.

Kino had never seen him like this before. It sounded almost like a dog barking.

But Kino, who was at heart a nice person, still got angry over his question.

"Hey, you'd better stop badmouthing people like that. It's not like you know Shizu-senpai that well, anyway."

"Then can *you* claim to know him well?"



GAKUEN KINO

"...Uh. No, not really."

"Then how would you know?"

"..."

Kino was at a loss for words.

"Why do you still try to defend him? Is it because he's handsome? Because he's polite? Because he looks that way? Who can say that all of that is not a mask? That it's not a part he's playing on this stage of life? Is there some omnipotent goddess who vouches for his innocence?"

Kino decided to stop taking Inuyama seriously as he became more and more heated.

"Never mind! Right now we've gotta focus on finishing the play properly. Get your priorities straight!"

It was like a hard reset button.

Of course, Kino's mind was currently preoccupied with thoughts of pork dumplings.

"..."

Inuyama was silent for a few seconds, then broke out into a smile. It was a smile no different than usual. A smile that other female students considered cute and Kino considered relentlessly annoying.

"I see." Inuyama spoke, his tone the same as always. "That's right. 'finishing the play properly' is top priority."



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It was time for them to take the stage.

The duo, played by Kino and Inuyama, were looking around the base when they were reunited with the old man in a prison cell.

Meanwhile, Shizu, in the role of Benedict, was eating alone at the base's cafeteria, ad-libbing nutritional information about military rations.

Upstage was the cell, and stage left was the cafeteria. The three actors were all standing in front of the audience.

The play had just reached the climax of the story. What will the (plywood) old man tell Allison and Wil?

One of the men in black prepared to play the old man's voice on the laptop. Chako-sensei, wearing her black wig with an eye covered, was standing beside him with her arms crossed.

There were two millimetres between the man in black's finger and the "enter" key.

CRACKBANGCRASH

They were the sounds "crack" "bang" and "crash" melded into one.

The screen behind the stage ripped and fell helplessly.

A cloud of dust rose up and debris from the broken wall scattered over them.

"Whoa!"



GAKUEN KINO

"Hah!"

"Hmph!"

The debris rained down upon Kino, Inuyama, and Shizu. One particular concrete piece, about 40 centimetres in length, flew straight towards Shizu. He managed to parry it with his sheathed katana.

Thankfully, the debris had only scattered over the stage. There was no harm done to the audience. However, the playgoers were trembling in their seats, shocked by the sudden noise.

"What was that...?"

Chako-sensei frowned. The man in black was also completely still, stunned by the sound. He had not managed to hit the "enter" key.

The dust soon settled.

And "it" emerged, in full view of both the cast and the captive audience.

I suppose the best way to describe this creature is to call it "tortoise-like"? It was similar to a tortoise. It was a gigantic bipedal tortoise. In other words, a demon.

The demon appeared with a bang, crushing the thick reinforced concrete that was behind the stage.

"Oh! A demon!" said Kino.

"..." said Inuyama.



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"Why now..." said Shizu.

The trio all switched from acting mode to battle mode.

However, they were still on stage, in full view of the entire audience! To say they were visible would be an understatement.

"Hermes! W-what do I do?" Kino asked quietly.

"I don't know. This is not good."

Hermes had no clear answer.

Meanwhile, Shizu had his right hand over the hilt of the katana, but he had yet to draw it.

And offstage--

"C-commander!" The man in black at the computer addressed Chako-sensei.

My god! Kuroshima Chako-sensei had been the commander of the Anti-Demon Corps from the previous episode! No reader could ever have guessed--what kind of author announces something this obvious? With exclamation marks, at that.

Chako-sensei steepled her fingers in front of her face, as if covering her own mouth.

"Hmph..."

And for some reason, she smiled.



GAKUEN KINO

"Don't worry. It's just as planned."

The moment the man in black cocked his head to ask why, Chako-sensei took the backup mic and turned it on.

[Suddenly, just as the old man was about to reveal the location of the treasure... a demon appears to prevent this massive secret from getting out! How could this be?! A demon has appeared! The poor old man is knocked unconscious when he is hit by debris!]

The narration was reminiscent of a live coverage of a wrestling match. Chako-sensei rambled on as if she'd been preparing for this beforehand. The plywood playing the role of the old man was on the floor, having been actually hit by debris.

There was a roar of laughter from the audience.

"Oh, so that's how it goes!"

"These special effects are amazing! It's totally surprising!"

"It's like it really broke through the gymnasium wall!" (note: the gymnasium wall was broken.)

"So demons existed in that world too... so now the characters are going to have to fight it."

"They're changing it into an action story? Sweet!"

"So that's how the beautiful love story between Shizu-senpai and Inuyama-senpai starts..." (note: this doesn't happen.)

Above were some of the audience reactions.



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"W-what? What the hell is that supposed to mean?!" Kino yelled in stupefying shock, amidst the audience's cheering.

However, the audience thought that what Kino just said was one of Allison's lines. A lot of them thought, *'That fourth-year's suddenly gotten more expressive'.*

The demon, growling pretty loudly for a tortoise, looked over at Kino and Inuyama on its left. It then looked over to Shizu on its right.

Shizu silently drew. The spotlight reflected off the shining blade, and Shizu took a deep breath in preparation for his long, upcoming line.

"Oh, what is this? I sense a demon in the cells! It seems it is now time for me to fight! For my identity as a Royal Air Force pilot is only a ruse! In reality, I am the demon-slaying Paladin of the Bezelese Royal Family, 'Carr Benedict of Zephyr'! I had been at this base at His Majesty's orders, but now the time has come to fight! Let's go! I shall fell this demon!"

The audience understood everything--what kind of a play this was, and why Benedict had a katana with him all this time.

"Go, Shizu-senpai!" The girls cheered.

"Whoa, the Prettyboy Swordsman is finally here!" Some of his male 6th-year peers joined in. The audience laughed comfortably.

"Whew..." Chako-sensei smiled.

"Damn, it can't be! The old man's fainted because of the demon! We have to treat him, but slaying this demon comes first! Dammit,



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looks like I'll have to reveal my true identity!" Inuyama yelled out of the blue.

Kino turned to him in surprise. Inuyama just kept going.

"I, Wilhelm Schultz, am actually a Student Combatant from the Roxcheanuk Confederation's Education Department--a human weapon who had been training in to defeat demons! I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier, Allison. But I have to go and fight now! To save both Roxche and Sou Beil--no, countries don't matter! To bring peace to all who live on this planet! Farewell, my student life... farewell, my beloved Allison. My name is 'Wilhelm of the Crimson Ammo'. Now I shall draw to shoot rounds full of spirit!"

Both Shizu and Inuyama were geniuses, being able to spout out lines like that on the spot.

"Kyaaaa! You're so cool, Inuyama!"

Another round of screaming ensued. Looks like Shizu and Inuyama held equal shares of popularity in this school.

Of course, the audience now looked towards Kino, who had yet to reveal her secret identity.

Who could Allison be? She can't be just an ordinary pilot with a crush on her childhood friend, right? Is what they all thought.

"Oh? Huh? Um..."

Kino panicked.

"Uh... could I just leave...?"



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The silent crowd burst out into uncontrollable laughter.

The audience understood everything--this was a comedic scene in which the heroine was joking around.

As Kino looked at the applauding audience in confusion, Hermes began urging her quietly.

"Kino! That's a real demon! You have to transform now and seal it away!"

"B-but I can't shoot Big Cannon if I don't transform..." Kino mumbled.

"You have to do something. Do you have any smoke bombs?"

"Oh! I should have some in my pouch..."

"Set one off and transform! You can seal it away as soon as you transform and ad-lib the ending."

"B-but... but..."

"Better than letting things get any bigger and getting students injured, right? It'll be easier to clean up afterwards, too."

"But... but..."

"Pork dumplings."

"Here I go!"



GAKUEN KINO

As the audience watched in breathless anticipation, Kino raised her voice, opened her pouch, and took out an M79 grenade launcher. It was a folding type of firearm that shot .40mm grenades.

A member of the audience commented that he had a model of one of those. The author has one too.

Kino loaded the grenade launcher with a live smoke bomb and shot it towards the ceiling. The smoke bomb, having fallen back onto the ground, released a cloud of white smoke. Within three seconds, the stage was completely obscured.

Kino, Inuyama, the demon, and Shizu all disappeared from sight.

"Heh."

Chako-sensei smiled and snapped her fingers. One man in black nodded, turned around the large wind machine that was used for the flying sequences, and turned on the power.

The smoke that was travelling towards the audience was sucked away by the makeshift ventilator.

"Amazing! This is totally amazing!"

"This is pretty high-budget."

"This rocks!"

The audience grew more and more excited by this amazing display of special effects. It seemed that everything that occurred on stage was, in their minds, part of the play. At this rate, Kino could probably get away with murder.



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The smokescreen didn't last more than a few seconds. It cleared very quickly.

And those who stood on the stage were unveiled at last.

"Transformation Complete! Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino! Fight mercilessly for your food!"

On stage right was Kino, in battle pose with Hermes.

"My strategy--fall!"

On stage right was the perverted samurai, dressed in his usual white standing-collar uniform, white cape, white mask, and the apple. A dove flew past him in slow motion.

And--

"Today, I will defeat you..."

Slightly to the right of centre stage was a young man in a black trenchcoat and sunglasses with his white hair tied back. He was positively dripping with an aura of rage.

"Guuuuooohh...?"

The demon was frozen in place, observing the three mysterious newcomers in confusion.

The audience was going wild.

"WHOA! It's Mysterious rest omitted Kino!"

"Kino!"



GAKUEN KINO

"It's Kino!"

"Kino is here!"

Everyone's eyes were on Kino, whose name and face were well known to the audience.

"No, wait a second." One male student interrupted everyone else. He spoke confidently.

"Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino only ever appears when she's fighting real demons. That's just the student named Kino, dressing up as Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Kino."

This student's assertion spread amongst the audience like wildfire.

"Oh, that's it?"

"I guess that's probably right."

"Now that I look closely, it's just Kino."

"You don't even need to look closely to tell."

"Yeah. The real thing looks a lot stronger."

"The real Kino is prettier."

The audience understood everything.

"What?! It's me! I just transformed! Use those eyes in your heads!" Kino yelled, irritated. There was laughter from the audience, where people had thought that Kino had suddenly



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developed a talent for comedy. Putting that aside, what are you gonna do if you just spill your identity like that?

"Don't worry about them. Just pretend you're still acting like Allison dressed like Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Kino."

Hermes advised. It was kind of complicated.

"They think the demon's a part of the show, too. It might be better that way--even if the students are used to demon attacks, there might be a huge panic if they figure out it's real." Hermes continued. Kino swore quietly.

"Shizu-senpai's costume is kind of weird, but it's still cool!" one of the girls screamed. Kino replied in exasperation.

"WHAT?! What are you saying?! That's Samoyed Mask! How does that guy look anything like Shizu-senpai? That pervert must have sniffed out the demon and pushed Shizu-senpai aside when I set off the smoke bomb!" she yelled, outraged. It was a quiet scream this time, so the audience didn't laugh.

Kino was livid.

That pervert had used *her* smokescreen to *his* own ends, pushed Shizu-senpai off somewhere, and appeared in his stead!

"What a bastard! They don't even look a thing alike! Are those people blind?! They're all stupid! This is unforgivable!"

"No comment." Hermes muttered.



GAKUEN KINO

"Inuyama~!" some of the girls screamed, and the boy in sunglasses waved shyly. From his sleeves he had produced a pair of Beretta 90two 9mm semi-automatic pistols.

"WHAT?! What are you saying?! That's Detective Wanwan! It's definitely him! Don't insult the guy who kicked that useless Inuyama off the stage and came to help!"

Kino was, once again, outraged.

"They're treating the helpful Detective Wanwan the same as that stalker! They don't even look a thing alike! Are those people blind?! They're all stupid! This is unforgivable!"

"No comment." Hermes muttered.

The boy in sunglasses--Detective Wanwan--approached Kino and whispered.

"Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Kino. I understand you must be angry, but I believe it would be best for now to pretend you are the student called Kino and perform the role of Allison. You must keep the situation from getting out of hand. Let's destroy the demon quickly so the audience will be safe from stray bullets. I will give you my full cooperation."

"Thanks!" Kino replied happily. Her expression, however, soon darkened.

The demon was on centre stage, fighting the Swordfighter Man. It was a suspenseful fight sequence.

"What about that Pervert Mask...? Bullets and logic don't work on him..."



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"About that... I'd like to discuss it with you."

Whisperwhisperwhisper

Detective Wanwan and Kino's strategy time.

Upon hearing Detective Wanwan's plan, Kino's expression changed. She looked straight at his sunglasses-covered face and spoke.

"You... are a genius."

"Pitiful demon! I will not let you take this world!" Samoyed Mask yelled, and went in for a high slash.

As Samoyed Mask has not introduced himself this time, he doesn't get a cool suffix like α, R, β, θ, Δ, κ, or ε. For the first time since episode 1, he's just Samoyed Mask.

"Haaaaah!"

Samoyed Mask's powerful attack was deflected by the arched shell of the demon's back. It wasn't a tortoise for nothing.

The demon then countered at blinding speed with a triple kick!

"OH! Hah! Hyah!" Samoyed Mask blocked the strikes with his katana and flung himself backwards, getting some distance between himself and the demon.

"Oh? You're pretty good."

He got back into an attack stance.



GAKUEN KINO

There was a thunderous round of applause from the audience.

"This battle is great!"

"What a fight scene!"

"Just what I expected from Shizu-senpai!"

"That guy in the demon costume's pretty tough..."

"I guess the demon practises karate!"

"He's moving pretty fast for a guy in costume..."

GAAAAAOOOOOOH! The demon roared. Several of the girls screamed, but most people clapped at this show of valour. That was great! Show us more!

"Now."

"Got it!"

Kino and Detective Wanwan nodded at each other, having completed their strategy meeting. Kino's line came first.

"Uh... I, um... I am the Roxche Air Force's top demon-slaying pilot! My name is... uh... 'Bishoujo Pilot Magical Allison'! The world does not belong to you, demon! I will destroy you on behalf of our taxpayers!"

The line was an ad-lib, so this was the best Kino could do. She desperately put together lines from anime she used to watch years ago.

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Allison has finally revealed her true identity! The audience cheered loudly.

"That's a really corny name. You have no naming sense, Kino." Hermes muttered. How is it any worse than Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Kino?

"I see! So Allison was also a demon-slaying warrior! All right! Time for a team-up!"

Detective Wanwan raised his right arm.

"Cross!"

Kino linked her right arm with his.

"Huh? Was this how 'Allison' actually went...?" one audience member wondered, but his voice was swallowed by the applause.

"I will attack first!" Detective Wanwan declared, and fired his Beretta 90twos. The target: the demon at centre stage. He turned his back and moved to the side so as to avoid sending stray bullets into the audience.

Of course, the Berettas were real guns. They fired loudly, the shots echoing through the gymnasium, and shell casings fell to the ground like rain.

"It's not just the swordfight! The gun looks really realistic too!"

"Shell casings everywhere!"

"Is that a modded 92F?"



GAKUEN KINO

"Inuyama-senpai... he's so cool!"

All of the bullets reached their target. However, 9mm Parabellum rounds were only strong enough to give the demon a light shock.

It advanced step by step, towards Detective Wanwan. And as soon as he was out of ammo, the demon went for a stomp.

"Hah!"

Detective Wanwan barely managed to evade the attack. He jumped back, put his feet together, and somersaulted into the air. It was incredible.

He landed softly in the centre aisle of the seats, near the fifth row.

"Pushing back the 6th place competitor of the Kaashi Festival Sharpshooting Competition this far... You're pretty good, demon!"

His acting was superb. The girl who was sitting beside him fainted out of sheer joy.

"Look out, Wil! Take this! 'Allison Desperado Fire'!" Kino yelled, and slid to face the demon standing at centre stage. On hand was a Minigun.

To be precise, she was actually holding it at her side. A Minigun is a six-barrelled 7.62mm Gatling gun. The barrels are motor-driven, and it is a monstrous gun that can fire over fifty rounds a second. It was used in the film '*Terminator 2*' by the current governor(as of writing) when he fought the police on top of the building.

With her right hand Kino held the metre-long Minigun, and with her left she held a cylindrical magazine that looked rather like a drum



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canister. She opened fire. At this speed, the sounds of the individual gunshots would meld together and create one long series of noises. The spent shell casings fell to the floor in a golden cascade.

Not even the demon could survive this kind of an assault. Just one shot might have been like a single punch to it, but being hit with a hundred *Atatatatatatatatata*s would send it flying backwards.

And the demon was sent flying backwards. It fell right through the hole in the gymnasium wall that it had made and disappeared.

Kino ceased fire.

The Minigun's six barrels spun out the rest of their momentum, emitting white smoke. They soon came to a stop. Kino slowly placed it back into her pouch.

As a side note, this firearm is usually mounted on helicopters or vehicles. The high rate of fire and the powerful recoil is not something that a human could withstand. People only shoot it barehanded in movies, and the scenes are shot with blanks, not live ammo.

So, dear readers--if you should come across one of these on the streets, please don't even think about trying to fire it barehanded.

When the demon had dynamically disappeared into the wall--

"Amazing!"



GAKUEN KINO

"It's practically a *tokusatsu*¹²!"

"Great job, Allison!"

"Pretty good!"

"Allison's so strong!"

The audience unplugged their ears and applauded loudly.

"Did you finish it, Allison?"

"Probably... Wil."

The two fighters were on very good terms.

When Detective Wanwan heard the word "probably", he twisted his lips slightly and smiled.

A little earlier, during the strategy session, he had requested thus:

"If successful, please answer 'probably'. If not, please say 'not yet'."

"Probably" meant that it was a success.

What?

The demon sealing.

¹² Tokusatsu is a genre of Japanese film/television which involves the heavy use of special effects. It's usually for kaiju movies in the vein of *Godzilla* or sentai movies like *Kamen Rider*.



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No one but Kino (and Hermes) had noticed.

The moment the demon was flung back through the wall, Kino had shot it with Big Cannon~Shining Iron Demon Destroyer.

Kino had taken her hand off the Minigun for a moment and drawn Big Cannon from the holster to fire it instantly.

The sealing shot found its target the moment the demon fell through the wall. On the other side was likely the unconscious karate club student.

The sound of Big Cannon firing was definitely included in the previous sequence. I tip my hat to anyone who noticed. You earn the title of 'Gakuen Kino Meister'--
whatdoyoumeanyoudontneeditokayokayallright.

In other words, the demon had already been sealed away and returned to his student form.

There was no need to keep up battle mode in this play now, but--

"Wait! I still sense something evil!"

"Yeah! Don't let your guard down, Wil!"

Huh? They were still keeping up the charade.

"Heh..."

Chako-sensei smiled as she watched from backstage. And--



GAKUEN KINO

"Take care of the BGM." she ordered a man in black, and disappeared somewhere.

"Hm...! Mysterious Kino-I mean, Beautiful Foreign Warrior and Boy! What is going on here?" Samoyed Mask asked, half-acting-half-seriously.

"I no longer sense evil... could you have... defeated it? Just as you sent it flying backwards...?"

Samoyed Mask was as sharp as ever. He sheathed his sword and stalked over to the duo at centre stage.

However, that duo walked in the opposite direction and knelt before the fallen old man (plywood).

"Oh, please! Open your eyes!"

"No... these injuries are..."

It was a heartfelt performance.

"Huh?"

They were completely ignoring Samoyed Mask, who cutely cocked his head.

"Sir... we're sorry we hid our true identities..."

"...Yes? What? You'll tell us where the treasure is?"

The two lent their ears to the piece of plywood.

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"W-what?!"

"Unbelievable! But this is the hidden truth!"

"We understand! Please, leave the rest to us... oh, how could this happen...?!"

"Please, rest in peace..."

The man in black played an appropriate piece of music. The duo wailed mournfully for a few moments.

It seems the old man had imparted a shocking truth to them with his last breath. The audience fell silent in sombre sadness.

Kino got to her feet.

Detective Wanwan as well.

"Allison... now we know of the true enemy, who's hidden the treasure away... this will be our last battle."

"I know, Wil. Now is the moment of truth..."

From Detective Wanwan's sleeves emerged a pair of Kimber 45mm automatic handguns. It was a tuned and customized copy model of the Colt Government.

Kino took from her pouch a Mossberg Model 590. *Click.* She pulled back the pump and loaded the 12 gauge shotgun slugs. It was a type of projectile that scattered over an area from the shotgun's muzzle. It was quite a dangerous weapon.



GAKUEN KINO

"Finally, the last battle..."

"So the demon was only a mid-boss."

"What's gonna happen now?"

"This is exciting."

And as the audience watched in anticipation--

"What is the matter...?"

Samoyed Mask naively approached Kino and Detective Wanwan.

The duo simultaneously turned their faces and glared at Samoyed Mask.

"Paladin Benedict!" Kino yelled.

"So *you* were the enemy of this world who has hidden away the treasure!"

Huh? Samoyed Mask stopped in his tracks and cocked his head in the opposite direction from before.

"Don't play dumb! The old man told us right before he passed away! He had a treasure that could bring peace to the world, but you stole it away from him!"

What's going on? Samoyed Mask had no idea what was happening. Why were they taking the play in this direction?

The audience, however, was merciless.



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"No way! So the final boss was Sh-Benedict!"

"How could this be...?! But Inuyama's so handsome!"

"The final boss. This is pretty awesome."

"So Sou Beil was an evil country all along? This ending's pretty black-and-white."

Tadadadada! A powerful BGM began playing to set up the climax of the play.

"For peace! Take this!"

Detective Wanwan spun in midair. At the same time, he continuously fired the Kimbers in his hands. After all, the audience can't get hurt if the bullets were coming at Samoyed Mask from above. Of course, unless Samoyed Mask were to throw himself into the audience.

"Hm?! This can't be!"

Samoyed Mask drew and began blocking the bullets. Unfortunately for him, he couldn't deflect them to his right, where the audience sat.

Unusually for him, Samoyed Mask was now deflecting the rounds with perfect precision and calculation.

"Ugh..."

His ever-present, laid-back smile had been wiped off his face.



GAKUEN KINO

"I will protect this world!" Kino joined Detective Wanwan. She held the Mossberg at waist-level and opened fire.

Samoyed Mask was put on the defensive. He deflected the bullets from above with his katana and blocked the slugs with tomatoes from his pocket.

This was Kino and Detective Wanwan's plan.

They would get rid of Samoyed Mask and all his nuisances by making Benedict the villain of the play and killing him.

Of course, they didn't mean to *actually* kill him. They planned to beat him to a pulp, make him surrender, and have him sign a contract saying that he would not get in their way when sealing demons.

The audience would be the witnesses. They were even going to end the play by saying, "We may have defeated Benedict, but the true battle is only just beginning!". This was all planned out by the brilliant Detective Wanwan.

"Haah!"

Detective Wanwan reloaded and jumped into the air to shoot Samoyed Mask from above.

"I can't lose!"

Kino provided support fire from the side.

Not even Samoyed Mask could dodge all the bullets. His katana soon snapped. Looks like he was also out of tomatoes as well. All



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he could do now was shield himself with his cape. Don't ask me how he can block bullets with a piece of silk.

"That's enough, Wil!" Kino yelled, holding fire.

"Fallen Paladin Benedict! Surrender! We will forgive you if you tell us the location of the treasure and swear not to get in our way again! The specifics are here! Sign it!"

Kino yelled, as they had planned earlier. However--

"Maintain Discipline!"

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Detective Wanwan did not cease fire. He mercilessly shot at Samoyed Mask, who was desperately blocking the rounds with his cape.

"Wait, Detective Wanwan-I mean, Wil! Stop it!" Allison-I mean, Kino yelled, surprised. Detective Wanwan glanced at Kino and replied.

"No, Allison! This is all a part of the Dark Knight Benedict's plan! If we don't destroy him now, he'll destroy the lives of many more innocent people!"

He loaded the Kimbers with yet another pair of magazines from his sleeves and continued firing with both hands, constantly moving.

Kino was much too nice.

Detective Wanwan's true goal was to murder Shizu/Samoyed Mask during this endless rain of bullets.



GAKUEN KINO

Of course, if he managed to actually murder Shizu here, people would only think that the character of Benedict was killed in the play. The show would end with an impressively realistic show of special effects, and he could slip away before anyone ever noticed.

Detective Wanwan's deduction was that he could not win one-on-one. His genius plan in which Kino would provide support and Samoyed Mask would have to protect the audience was about to come to fruition.

"Wait, Wil! He can't fight anymore! We have to get some info from him, so stop it now!" Kino yelled again.

"Go to Hell, Dark Knight Benedict!"

Detective Wanwan wasn't even pretending to listen.

"Ugh..."

Samoyed Mask would not be able to keep this up much longer.

"Is there a weapons salesman in the audience from whom I could purchase a katana? What about a vegetable seller?" He cried out in desperation, but the audience was overcome with laughter at this unexpected joke.

Thud. Samoyed Mask finally fell to his knees. It seemed that shooting from above the cape was an effective strategy.

"It's over! I'll finish you!"

As Detective Wanwan yelled from above,



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"Ugh... so this is the end..."

and Samoyed Mask prepared for death--

CRACKBANGCRASH

They were the sounds "crack" "bang" and "crash" melded into one.

The demolished stage wall fell apart even more with a thunderous noise.

A cloud of dust rose up and debris from the broken wall scattered over them.

"Whoa!"

"Hah!"

"Hmph!"

The debris rained down upon Kino, Detective Wanwan, and Samoyed Mask. One particular concrete piece, about 40 centimetres in length, flew straight towards Detective Wanwan. He managed to parry it with the Kimber in his left hand, but the gun was now damaged beyond repair.

Thankfully, the debris had only scattered over the stage. There was no harm done to the audience. However, the playgoers were trembling in their seats, shocked by the sudden noise. They also complained about the overly realistic special effects.

"What is this? Another demon?" Kino asked.

"Don't get in my way!" Detective Wanwan yelled.



GAKUEN KINO

"What...?"

As Samoyed Mask (who go to his feet in the commotion) and the audience watched with bated breath, the dust began to settle.

And from the dust emerged--

"GAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!"

something that made Samoyed Mask emit a terrible scream--

"..."

A lone girl who stood there in silence. She had white hair and emerald-green eyes. She wore grey shorts that showed off her stick-thin legs and a brown shirt with a round cut.

"Oh! That's Ti!" Kino yelled. It was Ti, the Grenade Girl who had entered battle with them once before.

"Oh!"

Before Detective Wanwan, who had landed on the stage, could even brace himself, Ti flew straight through the air and climbed onto Detective Wanwan's back.

"Ack! No! Stop it! Stoooooop iiiiiitttt!"

She rubbed her chin and cheeks against his hair.

No amount of flailing from Detective Wanwan was enough to throw Ti off his back.



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"Who... who is that girl?"

"A new character? This far into the story?"

"She's adorable."

"Never mind! Look at Shizu-senpai--I mean, Benedict! Why's he so scared?"

"That's some performance, Shizu."

Kino stood in shock, Mossberg still in hand.

"..."

She didn't know what to do.

"This is incredible!"

A loud voice suddenly echoed through the gymnasium. The voice belonged to the phone strap Hermes, who was still on Kino's belt.

"A mysterious girl appears just as the two heroes are about to finish off Benedict! Is she an enemy or an ally? The plot thickens! The mystery girl is played by Chako-sensei's niece. She doesn't have any lines because her Japanese isn't that great."

The audience understood everything--the narration was perfectly believable.

"You sure it's okay to do this, Hermes?" Kino asked tentatively.

"The play's a pretty big mess at this point, anyway. It's best to finish this."



GAKUEN KINO

Kino nodded. She wondered how she could end the play with the traumatized Samoyed Mask curled up in a corner and Detective Wanwan still flailing to try and throw off the little girl.

And after thinking it over, Kino spoke.

"Oh, that girl! It's Ti, the mysterious girl who granted me these powers! If she's come all the way here, it means she must have found a new threat!"

It was a somewhat-no, *very* forced turn of events.

"She's taken down Benedict, calmed down the rampaging Wil, and now she's here to reveal my next mission! Thank you! I'll strengthen my resolve to fight!"

Kino shone on the stage as she spouted out a series of blatant lies. It was an Oscar-grade performance.

Kino continued as the audience watched the climax of the story.

"I've been drawn into the never-ending spiral of battle... but I swear! I will never give up! After all, our fight is only just beginning!"

Tada! The final BGM began playing with serendipitous timing. It at least *looked* somewhat planned.

And just before the stage lights dimmed--

"GAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!" Samoyed Mask yelled, but to the audience it was Shizu's stupid screaming echoing through the gymnasium.



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"Stop it! No! Somebody help me!" Detective Wanwan pleaded as he comically attempted to detach the little girl from his back.

"Thanks for coming, everyone! Look out for the sequel!" Kino finished, having exactly zero plans to perform in a sequel.

The play was forcibly brought to an end.

The lights went down. The play was over. The audience applauded.

"Well. So it's over?"

"Oh. I guess I'll have to wait for the sequel."

"Wasn't it too long to have a sequel?"

"Shizu-senpai was so cute at the end!"

"It was pretty good."

"Those special effects were awesome."

"That's not how '*Allison*' goes... did they even read the original...?"

The students filed out of the gymnasium, sharing their thoughts.

Kino, who had turned back to normal and walked off the stage as soon as the lights dimmed--

"Oh!"



GAKUEN KINO

almost walked straight into Shizu, who was curled up with a dismal expression on his face.

"A-are you okay, senpai? Did you get hurt when Samoyed Mask shoved you off the stage...?"

"It's nothing... please leave me alone for now..." Shizu said, head down. Kino couldn't bring herself to ask anything else, so she went off to find Inuyama and Chako-sensei.

"Sensei! You're heavy!"

"Who cares? It's not like I'm breaking anything!"

Kino found Chako-sensei, still in her black dress and leaning over Inuyama.

"Oh, Kino! You're not hurt?" Chako-sensei asked with a smile.

"Huh? Oh... I'm fine."

"That so? Thank goodness. Inuyama's fine too." she was still smiling.

Kino laughed sheepishly, glad that she was able to fool everyone else.

"It was a bit crazy for a while there, but I'm glad we finished it properly! Your ad-libs were all superb! I was moved! This is a success--and that demon was something else! I never could have expected something like that. You little rascals, surprising your teacher like that! I loved it! You were all great!"



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Chako-sensei said all this from Inuyama's back. Inuyama himself was wearing a forced face of stoicism. Shizu, still rattled, was curled up on the floor.

Kino thought for a moment.

"Um... sensei."

"What is it?"

"About that demon... actually, it might have been the real thing..."

"Oh? Why is that?"

"Actually..." Kino fell into thought again. But she decided to tell Chako-sensei in order to prevent any misunderstandings.

"Actually... when the demon appeared, I set off the smoke bomb and... I ran off the stage!" Kino lied. Oh my! Chako-sensei was shocked. Inuyama glanced at her.

"I noticed it was a real demon and ran away because I was scared. Then Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino appeared from the back! She said, 'Leave the rest to me!'..."

"Oh my! Oh my!"

"So everything afterwards was all her... I didn't do anything. Shizu-senpai and Inuyama held on through it, even putting on costumes--but I was hiding because I was scared. I'm sorry."

'That's a pretty convincing lie.' Hermes thought.



GAKUEN KINO

"So you did nothing while all that was going on? While Inuyama and Shizu were doing all they could to hold down the fort!" Chako-sensei said, shocked.

"I... I'm sorry." Kino could do nothing but apologize. After all, she was the one who brought up the issue in the first place. Kino lowered her face.

Chako-sensei detached herself from Inuyama's back and put her hands on Kino's shoulder.

"Thanks for telling me the truth, Kino. Actually... I knew all along that you weren't up there, that it was Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino."

"Huh?"

Kino raised her head. Chako-sensei narrowed her eyes and continued.

"I was worried you'd try to take credit for someone else's work, Kino. But I knew you wouldn't let me down. Thank you!"

"Uh... you're welcome." Kino smiled bashfully. All's well that ends well. Honest people always get what they deserve.

However--

"Besides, it would've been terrible if that was you, Kino."

Kino frowned.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

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"This."

Chako-sensei held out a tiny scrap of paper. It was shiny and gold. It was also two centimetres wide.

"That... that's... it can't be...!" Kino muttered frantically, and Chako-sensei nodded gravely.

"It is... it's the ticket to the Chinese restaurant. I put it in my bag, but it was hit by a stray bullet from Mysterious Bishoujo Gun Fighter Rider Kino... she was avoiding the audience, but I guess she didn't see the black bag in the dark. My wallet's been turned to smithereens. This was all I could salvage."

"Then... then..." Kino's lip trembled. Her teeth clattered.

She covered her ears, as if rejecting Chako-sensei's words, but the information reached her eardrums anyway.

"Yeah. We can't use the ticket anymore." Chako-sensei said brightly.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Kino's scream echoed through the empty gymnasium.

It sounded like Chako-sensei was saying something, but Kino couldn't hear anything anymore.

Only despair.

"I was an orphan. Just like Hutch the Honeybee."



GAKUEN KINO

Chako-sensei began quietly.

They were on the school rooftop. The bright September moon shone in the sky.

Chako-sensei and Kino were sitting on a flower-print mat on the concrete floor.

Inuyama and Shizu sat on either side of them, looking up at the sky.

In each of their hands were hot, steaming pork dumplings. On the mat was a heated container containing many more.

They were from the Chinese restaurant.

The ticket had been ripped to shreds and rendered unusable, but the meal had been prepared anyway because Chako-sensei had made a reservation beforehand. She had asked for a huge delivery of dumplings to the school instead of a full-course meal at the restaurant. Of course, Kino didn't hear any of this for a while because she was screaming in despair.

"..."

Kino, who was in the middle of working on her third dumpling, stopped and looked at Chako-sensei in confusion when she began to talk seriously about her past.

The beautiful teacher continued, face lit by the moonlight.

"My parents abandoned me when I was a baby. I grew up in an institution overseas. I don't remember much, but the institution



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disappeared when the country crumbled. I had nowhere to go and was lost in despair."

"What happened then...?" Kino asked.

"A traveler saved me." Chako-sensei said with a soft smile.

"A traveler?"

"Yes. He was a tall man who was travelling with a big white dog. He happened to be in the country at the time and took me away, saying that there was nothing left for me there. And we travelled together. He was a kind man. He took care of me until I became an adult. Him, myself, and the dog travelled everywhere together. But he disappeared one day a few years ago, while we were travelling in this country. All he left was a letter saying 'You've grown up so well'."

"..."

Kino listened attentively to Chako-sensei's story, not yet reaching for her fourth dumpling.

"..."

And from beside them, Shizu--

"..."

and Inuyama both quietly listened to Chako-sensei.

The autumn moon shone beautifully in the night sky. The sound of crying insects surrounded their quiet world.



GAKUEN KINO

"That's why I decided to become a teacher. I wanted to help kids, the same way that man helped me."

"That sounds amazing." Kino responded honestly, and Chako-sensei grinned.

"Thank you. But all I did in college was make mistakes. I spent years doing nothing but work and study, and finally graduated. I came to this school, and..."

Chako-sensei quietly took a sip of Oolong tea from her mug. She continued.

"And I started this club. It's always been my dream, you see."

"Huh? Then--"

"Yes. I didn't make this club because I wanted to be a supervisor. I just wanted to try taking part in club activities. Sorry I was being so selfish. But I'd always wanted to do something fun with a group of people. I dreamt about it all the time."

"I see..."

Kino slowly reached for her fourth dumpling. She grasped it tightly and brought it to her mouth. And--

"Ever dream about eating delicious food with everyone else?"

Chako-sensei smiled.

"Of course! And looks like that one's come true today too! This is wonderful!"



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Kino took a bite out of her dumpling as Chako-sensei laughed.

"One of my dreams came true today, too."

Of course, Kino's dream was to eat these dumplings. '*That's a pretty small dream.*' Hermes thought, but he didn't voice his opinion.

"That's great! Life's all about dreaming big and working towards your goals!" Chako-sensei declared. She continued.

"And what about you two?"

She asked the male half of the club.

"..."

"..."

They said nothing and merely ate dumplings under the moonlight.

So Chako-sensei reached for Inuyama on her left and grabbed him by the back of the neck.

"Wh-what...?"

"Hold still."

Chako-sensei pulled Inuyama towards her and reached her arm to her right, bypassing Kino.

"Oh."



GAKUEN KINO

She took hold of Shizu's uniform and pulled him towards her as well. Kino got to her feet and looked at the sitting trio. Inuyama, Chako-sensei, and Shizu were sitting side-by-side.

"Hah!"

Chako-sensei grabbed the backs of their necks and pulled them to her chest.

"Uh."

"Um."

Inuyama and Shizu's faces were almost touching as they were held in Chako-sensei's embrace. Inuyama looked to his left and Shizu to his right, averting each other's sights.

Still holding the two students, Chako-sensei smiled and put her chin on their heads.

"You're both so gloomy! I don't care if you don't have dreams, or if you have secrets! But--"

"But what?"

"But...?"

Inuyama and Shizu asked.

"But--try to get along! As your teacher, I hope you can be friendly to each other!" Chako-sensei said, putting pressure on her arms.

"..."



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"..."

The duo said nothing. Shizu sighed heavily.

Kino watched the seemingly friendly trio from behind.

"..."

And she muttered, "First come, first served." as she reached for yet another dumpling.

"Just how many are you planning to eat?" Hermes was about to ask, but stopped himself.

The moon shone peacefully over the relaxed Take Action Now Club.

As a side note, the principal had determined that it would be dangerous to allow the Take Action Now Club to perform at the Culture Festival. It was only natural, as they had put a hole through the gymnasium wall with their special effects.

Kino was very relieved to hear this, but Chako-sensei didn't give up.

The very day that they were barred from the Culture Fest--

"In that case, we'll start a band! Culture Festivals these days are all about music! Doesn't matter if we're composing our own music or using the school song! Kino, you're on guitar. Inuyama's on drums, and Shizu's playing bass! And I'll be the vocalist!"

"Huh? Do we *have* to do something for the Culture Fest...?"



GAKUEN KINO

"Get your act together, Kino! Let's practice! We're going to take action now. Off to the music room to SING!"

"But they're still having class in there."

"Who cares about class? You have to listen to me sing! You're coming too, right, Inuyama?"

"..."

Inuyama had been tight-lipped under Chako-sensei's head, but--

"You're coming, right?"

He had no choice but to nod when Chako-sensei angrily elbowed his head.

So English class, the final period, had suddenly been turned into a self-study session.

Kino, Chako-sensei, and Inuyama headed for the music room. Chako-sensei began playing the piano like a master.

And her plan--

"LALALAlalalaLAAAAAA!"

was ruined because she was tone-deaf.

To be continued...?

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Chapter 6: Hermes Takes a Stand **~Strap Meets Girl~**

As the rain fell--

A lone cell phone strap was lost in thought.

It was a simply designed phone strap of green leather and yellow metal.

There was nothing attached to it--no keys, other objects, and of course, no cell phones.

It was merely a strap.

The cell phone strap was thinking about something, lying under the hydrangeas blooming by the bus lane sidewalk.

Drenched by the third day of rain--

The cell phone strap lay there like a stone, lost in thought.

He thought,

"Could I really find you?"

Gakuen Kino Chapter 6: Hermes Takes a Stand **~Strap Meets the Girl~**

It was one Sunday in June.



GAKUEN KINO

An afternoon drenched by the blessings of the rainy season.

A girl was walking on the bus lane sidewalks, which were lined on the sides by apartment buildings.

The girl was in her mid-teens. She had short black hair, large eyes, and a pretty face.

She wore a plain pair of jeans that you could find anywhere, and a black long-sleeved shirt. Over her chest was a large picture of a Škorpion vz. 61 submachine gun with the stock folded. Over her back were the words "That's right, a woman like me is a scorpion"¹³ written in Gothic font.

If you know where to buy a shirt like this, please contact the author. If you've actually made one of these shirts yourself, you might be better off not wearing it in public.

The girl was wearing a thick belt around her waist. On the right side was a leather holster containing a model revolver. Also on the belt were small green pouches that wrapped around her waist.

The girl wasn't holding a bag, but was holding a big black umbrella. Printed on one corner of the umbrella were the words 'Not secretly a SPAS-12'.

She walked through the rain and arrived at the station area. Around the JR station were shopping malls and restaurants.

¹³ Source of quote is unknown. Any suggestions?



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The girl, having arrived at the entrance of the area, stopped in front of the mailbox--a box three times faster than most boxes--and took out an envelope from her pocket.

"Go! To Grandma!"

The girl dropped the letter into the mailbox, speaking the name of the recipient. Of course, this is not necessary for safe delivery. Neither is praying after you've dropped it off.

She unclasped her hands from prayer.

"Well... what to do now?" she mumbled, having accomplished her mission of the day.

In front of her was a lively station. However--

"It's Sunday, so no new books or magazines are getting released. I can't just go on a shopping spree, either... I guess I should just go home. I'll just grab a snack at the convenience store. Ice cream... yeah, ice cream sounds nice."

The girl turned around and walked back the way she came.

She had gone about a hundred metres when she noticed someone. It was a grandmother on her way home from grocery shopping.

She was a tiny woman with a bent back who looked to be extremely elderly.

This grandmother was pushing a grocery cart with both hands, balancing an umbrella on top of it. The cart was filled with plastic bags from the local supermarket and paper bags from a department store.



GAKUEN KINO

It looked like she was trying to cross at a pedestrian crossing that didn't have a traffic light. The road was usually empty, but it was surprisingly crowded today. Actually, there was some emergency gas line work going on at the more often frequented road, diverting all of the traffic this way. Of course, the old lady didn't know this.

The old lady tentatively yet desperately tried to cross the street. She looked to her right, looked to her left, took a step forward, and hurried back when a car came speeding her way.

The cars just wouldn't stop for the old lady, as she was too short to be properly visible. Pedestrians actually have the right-of-way at a crossing. This question is on the driving exam.

"Hmm..."

The girl caught sight of this and made her move.

"You're trying to cross, ma'am? I'm going too. Let me help."

Kino didn't actually *have* to cross here, but it wasn't a complete lie, as a convenience store happened to be across the street from where they stood.

"How very thoughtful of you. Thank you, young lady."

"Just leave it to me!"

The girl stepped in front of the old lady and took one step into the crossing. She held out her right hand, which wasn't holding the umbrella.



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Her pose, proud as an athlete taking the Olympic Oath, brought one car to a stop. Another car on the opposite lane caught sight of this and also stopped.

"There's nothing to be scared of if we're crossing together! Let's take our time."

The girl and the old woman slowly made their way across the road.

"Thank you."

"It's no problem."

The cell phone strap was watching the chatting duo as they crossed the road.

He was watching them from the flower bed beside the crossing, drenched and without an umbrella.

'Helping an old lady cross the street in this day and age? What a kind-hearted girl. She just might be the one.' he thought.

Having crossed the street safely, the old lady thanked Kino profusely.

"Here, take this. It's not much, but..."

The old lady took out a package from her cart. It was from the department store's eatery section.

Inside were several individually-wrapped strawberry mochi. The old lady took one and handed it to the girl.



GAKUEN KINO

"Th-thank you! This is the special strawberry mochi from the _____ Place at the department store in front of the station, right? I love these!"

"I'm glad you like it. I'll be off now."

"All right. Take care, ma'am!"

Once the old lady had disappeared into the apartment, the girl looked down at the strawberry mochi in her hand.

And--

"Just as planned."

She smiled evilly, like she had just killed someone with a curse.

In other words, the girl had seen this package from the start. She had also calculated that if she'd helped this lady, there was a chance that she'd be given one in thanks.

My goodness.

The cell phone strap, however, was across the street. He couldn't see any of this. He couldn't hear any of her wicked laughter.

"Thanks for the meal!"

The girl cheerfully took an unseemly bite out of the mochi as she continued on her way.



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She had walked about two hundred metres since then. The strawberry mochi had long disappeared into her stomach.

Three boys around her age approached her from the other side of the wide sidewalk.

The trio were students from a different prefectural high school nearby. They were all in uniform, perhaps because they were on their way back from club activities. They seemed to be on their way to the station.

Normal people would just pass her by, but there was something strange about these three.

"Oh! It's her... it has to be...!"

One of them said, looking at the girl.

"Seriously, man? Now's your chance!"

"Yeah! Go over there! Ask her out!"

The other two urged him on.

It seemed that one of the trio had seen the girl before in passing and fallen in love with her at first sight. Of course, it looked like he had lamented to his friends that he would never see her again, and that he couldn't just barge into a school full of strangers to try and look for her.

The girl, who had no idea about any of this, continued walking towards them with the intention of passing them by.



GAKUEN KINO

When the gap between them had closed to about three metres, the boy finally worked up the courage to speak.

"W-wait! Please! I'd like to talk to you!"

The girl, surprised by the boy's sudden cry, looked around as if looking for the person he was talking to. There was no one around. Looks like she was the one.

"What is it?" the girl asked politely.

The boy, red as a tomato, was pushed over by his friends.

"Um! I happened to see you at the bookstore in front of the station before. E-ever since then, I couldn't stop thinking about you...!"

Most people would know from this that he was asking her out, but this girl was dense.

"I see. And?"

Her answer was stoic and professional.

"Huh? Well... uh..."

The boy was terribly flustered. He was completely unprepared for an answer like this.

He'd already said what needed to be said, after all. What more could he add? He was so nervous he couldn't speak. The boy was frozen for few seconds.

"Ask her to a movie!" his friend advised. Friends are wonderful people.



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"W-would you like to go watch a movie with me? I-I'll pay for the tickets!"

The boy was desperate to not lose this chance. So he squeezed every last drop of courage he had into this bold statement. '*There! I can do it too, if I put my mind to it!*' he thought, wanting for the first time to give himself a pat on the back.

His friends applauded him in their hearts and waited for the girl's response.

And the girl--

Still didn't get it.

"No thanks."

It was a cold answer.

[No, (I like free stuff, but I'd feel bad about owing someone.)
Thanks (anyway).]

This was what the girl meant. She didn't understand why this boy asked a perfect stranger to watch a movie with him. However--

"Oh..."

The boy was stunned.

The boy, thinking that she didn't like him, responded hurriedly.

"I-I see. I understand! Please excuse me!"



GAKUEN KINO

And he ran through the rain, tears falling from his face. Farewell, my love. And farewell, my foolish youth.

"Hey!"

"Wait up!"

His friends chased after him as he disappeared into the distance. The girl was left standing alone at the sidewalk.

'What was that about? Does he like movies that much? I guess it is fun to watch in a big group.'

The girl, completely dense when it came to the arts, continued walking, shaking her big black umbrella.

The boy had already gone a million lightyears away from her thoughts.

The girl's mind was filled with thoughts of the ice cream she would soon eat and buy.

Even after eating that gigantic strawberry mochi? Yes.

The cell phone strap was watching her.

The strap, who was just under the hydrangeas, was now atop a flowerbed beside the confession spot. Goddess knows how he got there.

And that cell phone strap thought--



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'Doesn't look like she's so easily swayed by the temptations of romance. She's an uncommonly strong and strict girl! I'm starting to like her even more!'

He was, yet again, under the wrong impression.

Having bought her ice cream (vanilla with a chocolate coating) at the convenience store, Kino finished it all at the parking lot, under her umbrella.

"That was good. I had a good walk and a nice snack, so I guess it's about time to get back to the dorms."

The girl entered a small alley from the busway. There was a sign ahead that read "_____ Academy ahead".

The girl was a dormitory student. She lived in the dormitories of this academy that had both a junior high and a high school.

It was about a ten-minute walk from the convenience store to the dormitories, and the road passed through a small suburb and a thick forest. One of the slight inconveniences of the dorms was that there were no shops or mailboxes between them. The school was atop a hill, and the dorms at the foot of the climb.

As a side note, there was a school bus that operated between the school and the station, as it was too far to walk to and back. The bus would pick up students at the big street by the suburbs and let them off at the main entrance.

The girl had just arrived at the small park beside the suburb.



GAKUEN KINO

Several boys of early elementary school-age were running around in rubber boots and raincoats, completely disregarding the heavy rainfall.

"They're so energetic." she mumbled, and was about to pass right by the park, when suddenly--

"Huh?"

The girl noticed that one child was being poked in the back by all the other children.

The child certainly didn't look very happy to be poked at, but the others just laughed and chattered, without showing any signs of stopping.

Kino then caught a glimpse of the face of a smiling boy in a yellow hat who was poking the lone child.

"Hm."

She took action.

Kino marched into the park she was about to ignore, raised her umbrella and her hand into the air, and shouted without warning.

"You little curs!"

Never mind the fact that no one these days uses the word "cur".

The children stopped in their tracks.

"If you're bothering him, stop it now! And if you're just playing around, find some other game to play!"

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The big sis unleashed her fury.

The kids were momentarily stunned, but they talked back at her, saying that she had nothing to do with this and that they were just having fun.

So the girl walked up to the boy in the yellow hat and pinched his hand before he could escape. It was an impressive display of force.

"Ouch! Ouch! What are you doing?"

"You said you were just having fun, right? So I'm joining in! How about this? Is it fun? Are you having fun? Well?!"

Kino's gleeful threat drove the children to silence. The boy she pinched turned his eyes away from her glare.

"You should play games that *everyone* can enjoy! How would you have felt in his shoes? And remember, what goes around comes around! What if *you* get bullied by someone next time? Do you think someone's going to come and help you? You're not too young to understand what I'm talking about, right? Well?!"

"O-okay..."

The defeated children nodded reluctantly.

"All right, then."

Kino let go, and the boy in the yellow hat rubbed his hand as he hesitantly stepped back. He then took the hand of the boy they were poking earlier.



GAKUEN KINO

"Sorry. Let's all go play together at my house."

As the children left the park, the girl added in a threatening tone--

"Remember! I'm always watching you. If I catch you bullying someone like that again, I'll be there in a flash!"

The girl's eyes glinted like a predator stalking her prey. They had the look of a murderer of dozens. If this were an anime, her eyes would be glowing red.

"..."

As the children left in silence--

"Whew."

the girl let out a languid sigh.

She then righted her umbrella and went back on her way.

And about thirty steps later, a devilish smile graced her lips.

"Hahaha! Serves you right, you brat! This is revenge for shooting me with a toy gun two months ago at the park! You got away last time, but you can't run forever! Man, that felt great!"

My goodness.

She hadn't actually been defending the weak or teaching a bully the ways of righteousness. Kino was just taking sweet, petty vengeance on a kid under the pretence of discipline.

But the cell phone strap, who was watching from a distance--

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"She worked so seriously to defend a total stranger from other kids! A true protector of justice, wearing the shell of a young girl!"

The cell phone strap was talking nonsense on top of the jungle gym. Don't ask how he got up there. That'll just hold back the narrative.

"I've decided! She's the one! Final answer!"

The school dormitories were in the forest.

A cylindrical main building was sandwiched in between the rectangular boys' and girls' dorms.

In accordance with falling birth rates and the increase of importance placed on privacy, each room housed one student. The rooms weren't big, but they had a bed, a desk, and other furniture needed for basic day-to-day life.

There was a green sailor suit hanging from her wall.

It was a minimally decorated room. There wasn't even a single poster on the wall, only a lone sticker on the door. The sticker was of a phrase: "Guns don't kill people. You're the one that does the killing.".

The girl was sitting at her desk, reading a comic magazine.

Outside, the twilight hours were darkened with rain and clouds. The only light source was the fluorescent desk lamp. It was just before the cafeteria dinner time.



GAKUEN KINO

The magazine pages were yellowed with age, and the cover was falling apart. The publishing date printed on the cover was dated at several years ago.

The magazine was a gift, left behind by an upperclassman Kino had never met. Books and magazines like this were commonplace in the dorms. According to rumours, male students would pass around dirty magazines in much the same fashion.

The girl was reading a comic about a female Special Forces Operative in high school who worked as a freelance killer with a Beretta 92 semi-automatic pistol.

"Wow. She's really cool."

--was Kino's opinion.

After finishing the comic, she placed the magazine on her desk and mumbled.

"Special Forces Operative, huh... but I'm just a normal high school student with marksmanship training from Grandma... Every day's normal. Nothing ever happens. No one's ever asked me out, and I don't do anything special..."

Kino mumbled all this as she set aside her ideas of normalcy, the confession she ignored, *and* the abnormal actions she took earlier.

It was at that exact moment.

"Don't worry! You can become cool too! You can be a Warrior of Justice!"



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Someone's voice rang out through the room. It was a young, boyish tone.

"W-who's there?" Kino knocked over her seat as she stood.

"If you can hear me--"

"I'm hearing things! It must be a hallucination! After all, I'm the only one in this room!" Kino declared, cutting off the mysterious voice. It was a very quick decision.

"W-wait--"

"Hm... I can't hear you!"

Kino desperately ignored the mysterious voice as she passed the time by spinning around the room. It was an interpretive dance.

"It's almost dinnertime. Not yet? I can't wait much longer~ Lalala~ Hmhmm~"

The timing was perfect.

The bell signalling dinnertime rang at that exact moment.

Kino stopped spinning.

"All right! Time to eat!"

"W-wait a second!"

"Can't do that. Gotta eat."

"You *can* hear me! So let me ask! Are you my master?"



GAKUEN KINO

"Nope. This is all a hallucination."

The girl left the room. She shut the door.

And the cell phone strap, who had squeezed into the room through the veranda door like a cricket--

"..."

was left alone in the room.

"This... this is amazing... I thought she might be surprised, but to think she'd just boldly and blatantly ignore me! That strength of heart and firm mindset is admirable! This girl is the one!"

The cell phone strap made a lonely show of himself.

Meanwhile, the girl had run to the cafeteria as fast as she could and was asking the cafeteria lady for an extra-large helping of rice as usual.

"I was so hungry I started hearing things. That was scary." she explained.

This isn't very relevant, but dinner tonight was composed of fried food.

First, there were two crunchy cream croquettes. They were warm and golden croquettes filled with corn. Cream would spill out if you cut it open with your chopsticks.



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There was one large fried shrimp. Inside the crispy fried batter was a large, juicy shrimp. Beside it was a special sour tartar sauce, meticulously crafted at the cafeteria kitchens.

The fresh diced cabbages that lined the plate were perfectly matched by the pork cutlet sauce. The Neapolitan spaghetti with parsley was an oily, but essential part of dinner.

On a smaller plate to the side was fresh spinach and seasoned tofu. The devil's tongue jelly and the carrots created a wonderful blend of colouring, and the smell of sesame was positively mouthwatering.

The miso soup was full of vegetables, moist fried eggplant and fried tofu. One sip would fill your mouth with the wonderful taste of miso (what else?).

The side dish was salted pickles, and the rice was the beautiful, silver-hued *akitakomachi*¹⁴. Both could be refilled infinitely.

If the side dishes weren't enough, there were seaweed and egg *furiwake*¹⁵ and bonito *furiwake*, and packs of *natto*¹⁶ as well.

The students were still young, after all. They should be well-fed and well-worked so they could grow tall and strong.

This concludes the completely irrelevant description of dinner. I wrote it to taunt all of you hungry readers. I regret nothing.

¹⁴ A famous type of rice in Japan.

¹⁵ A type of condiment for sprinkling on rice.

¹⁶ Fermented soybeans famous for their smell.



GAKUEN KINO

"I'm so full! That was great!"

The girl returned to her room in sheer euphoria.

It was dark outside the window. Kino turned on the light and closed the green curtains.

"Welcome back." the cell phone strap greeted quietly.

"Thanks." Kino responded obviously, brain still filled with pure joy for dinner.

"That was so good..."

The girl fell back onto her bed, taking off her belt with the holster. The cell phone strap, now on the desk, questioned the girl.

"Have you ever shot a gun before?"

Kino answered, looking up at the ceiling.

"Yeah. Grandma taught me to."

"That's great. So I wanted to ask you--"

"What? I don't want to subscribe to any newspaper, if that's what you're asking. I don't even get TV here. I don't need any jars, either."

"No, that's not it."



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"Then what?"

Kino asked, closing her eyes, stomach full and in peace.

She'd turn into a pig if she just fell asleep like this.

Suddenly, the cell phone strap said something shocking!

"Do you want to become a Warrior of Justice and protect this school?"

"Whaaaaat?!" Kino opened her eyes and sat up, using her abs.

She looked around, searching for the source of the voice.

"Where are you?"

"Right here."

The voice was coming from her desk. Kino went up to it and noticed the cell phone strap. It was definitely not her own.

She picked it up.

"Hello."

This strap was definitely the source of the voice.

"What? You're going to explain, right?" Kino asked stoically.

"I'll explain everything so it's easy to understand. The forces of evil are descending upon this school. They're planning to take root in the hearts of vulnerable teenagers, turn them into demons, destroy the school, and draw this society--this country--this



GAKUEN KINO

planet--into a whirlpool of chaos. And they're almost here. The Goddess of this world decided to protect it by turning me into a cell phone strap and sending me to find warriors to combat evil."

The girl frowned as she listened to the cell phone's serious explanation.

"Did you hit your head? ...wait. You don't have one, do you?"

The strap ignored her question.

"Only a fellow student can combat the demons. It also has to be someone with a heart full of justice. After all, the warrior has to remain in the closed space of school. It also has to be someone who can fire the legendary demon-sealing weapon, Big Cannon~Shining Iron Demon Destroyed. In other words, someone who knows how to use a gun. I can't leave it to someone who puts his finger over the trigger before he's ready to fire."

Kino asked quickly, "So where's this justice-loving student of yours?"

"Right here! You, the girl with a heart of gold, skilled in gun usage, is the best candidate to become the Warrior of Justice! The Goddess said when she sent me here that someone who was perfectly suited to the role would be nearby! And I found you! This must be fate! You are the warrior chosen by the Goddess! When demons appear, you have to use the Goddess's powers and transform into a Warrior of Justice to seal away the demons! End explanation."

"Why me...? Sure, I know how to use guns, but I'm not interested in Justice. Sorry, but go find someone else. Bye."



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Kino opened the curtains and the window. She opened the screen door, too.

Past the balcony was a forest damp with rainwater. And darkness. Kino was planning to throw the strap into that space.

"W-wait! There's more--"

"There is?"

"If you become a Warrior of Justice now, you'll receive three months' worth of free detergent!"

"Don't need it. The dormitory laundry room already has a lot of detergent from the newspaper company. They got it from the faculty office and the library's newspaper subscriptions. There's actually so much they don't think they can ever finish it,"

"I-I also have two tickets to an amusement park! How about a date with your boyfriend?"

"Are you making fun of me? I don't have a boyfriend."

"Become a Warrior of Justice now and get into shape! If you'll look at this graph, seven out of nine have successfully lost weight!"

"My BMI's fine. I don't need to go on a diet."

"The power of the Warrior of Justice will send scalar waves to deoxyribose nucleic acids and make you rich! The effects have been scientifically proven by Doctor Geroise Belmont of the University of East Illinois! You can buy a Ferrari and bathe in cash while being attended to by beautiful maids! Effects are near-instant!"



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"Does anybody even believe in stuff like that anymore?"

"Wait! Just one more minute! Please listen for one more minute! I'll explain how amazing it will be to become a Warrior of Justice. Please--"

"I don't want to."

"Then what am I supposed to do?!" the cell phone strap finally got angry. Looks like he may be suffering from calcium deficiency.

The girl began to warm up by rotating her shoulder. Looks like she had nothing to say anymore.

"If we talk it out, I'm sure we can reach an understanding¹⁷..." the cell phone strap muttered the famous last words (but not really) of a Prime Minister who was assassinated.

"I'll toss you after I listen to one last offer. Have fun in there."

The girl retained her cool.

The strap was in trouble.

"Ohhh... and I finally found someone, too..."

"Finished? Bye now. I have homework to hand in for tomorrow, and I need to get started. There isn't a lot of time, since I'm not so good at history and math. Bye. I hope someone nice picks you up."

¹⁷ Again, I don't know where this quote comes from.



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The girl took hold of the strap, raised one leg, and prepared to throw.

"You know, I could do that homework for you..."

The girl stopped in place upon hearing the strap mumble, and put her foot back on the ground. If there was a runner, he would have reached second base.

"What did you just say?" the girl asked.

"Huh? I said I could do your homework for you." the cell phone strap replied nonchalantly.

"You can do that?"

"My brain's different from that of a human's, you know."

He didn't look like he could have a brain anywhere, but setting that aside--

"Th-then try this!"

The girl shut the window and the curtains. She opened up her Japanese History textbook and put the strap on the page.

"Hm... Question 1: A. Question 2: C. Question 3: B. Question 4: B. Question 5: D."

Kino drew breath, watching the strap answer with ease, she then lifted it to eye-level. She smiled at him for the first time.

"What's your name?"



GAKUEN KINO

"My name's Hermes. A scrap who's been given the name of the Greek god of travellers and thieves."

"...you mean a strap?"

"Yeah, that's it."

As a side note, Hermes is also known as Mercury in Roman mythology, but let's set that aside.

"Hermes, huh? My name's Kino. Answer me. Answer me now!"

The girl who called herself Kino asked a question.

"If I become a Warrior of Justice, what about you?"

"Of course, I'm planning on staying as a cell phone strap on your belt 24/7 in case of demon attacks--"

"Even during tests?"

"Well... yeah..."

The strap trailed off, but it was a positive answer.

"I'll do it." Kino answered firmly.

"Huh?"

I'll be a Warrior of Justice. But in exchange, you have to help me out when I don't know something on a test, okay? Give and take."

"..."

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"Well?"

"As a high school student... It's your responsibility to work on your studies..."

Hermes trailed off again.

"Hm? You said you needed a Warrior of Justice right now, right? Or do you want to go back to the forest?" Kino threatened.

"Uh... I guess it wouldn't do for a Warrior of Justice to fail and drop out... so only if you're really in a tight spot."

Kino tossed Hermes into the air and clapped. She then caught him.

"Great! Contract completed! I'm counting on you, Hermes!"

"Thanks. Whew..."

The strap called Hermes sighed and fell into thought.

'Oh, Goddess! Have I made the right decision? Is this really all right...?'

"Yeah! Now I won't end up failing! Oh yeah, could you wake me up in the mornings so I don't sleep in? Thanks!" Kino spun around her room in a dance.

"I guess it's fine. After all, this will be hardest on you, Kino." Hermes replied.

Kino then stopped dancing and looked at Hermes, still resting on her palm.



GAKUEN KINO

"..."

She stared at him.

"Wh-what?" Hermes asked.

Kino screamed.

"Oh my gosh! The cell phone strap is talking!"

"You noticed that *now*?!"

This was how Kino and Hermes were brought together by fate.

Kino's first battle against a demon was not long afterwards. It was a summer day at the end of the rainy season.

The wheel of fate had begun to spin.

What will happen to Kino and Hermes?

That question is answered in volume one, currently in print.

VOLUME 02



Side Story: A Certain Day in a Certain Summer of a Certain Shizu and a Certain Samoyed Mask ~a Day of a Dog in Dog Days~

This is the story of a day in September that was, strangely enough, as hot as a midsummer day.

A certain Shizu was walking through the shopping district.

It was a school day. As usual, Shizu was wearing a white standing-collar uniform. At his side was a katana in a black sheath. As usual, he was boldly violating weapon possession laws. In his right hand was a large boston bag emblazoned with the logo of an athletics company.

It was just past 3 in the afternoon. The weather was boiling hot despite the fact that it was September.

The sun shone brightly from the clear blue skies, and the temperatures just kept soaring. There was a haze over the hot asphalt.

The stores on either side of him were open, but devoid of customers. The store owners were also cooped up inside. It was almost like a ghost town. There weren't any doves, either. In a little while, customers might make their way here to buy evening snacks, but the streets were quiet at the moment.

Shizu walked through the shopping district, cool as a cucumber. He wasn't sweating at all, despite the weather. Blocking sweat glands was easy for someone like Shizu.

Shizu arrived at a lamppost upon which was posted a warning: "Beware of perverts!". He walked by it.



GAKUEN KINO

And as he arrived at the boundary between the shopping district and the residential area--

"Damn it! Damn it all to Hell!"

He encountered a middle-aged man who was drunk at this time of day.

He was a rather large man who looked to be in his early fifties. The man was quite unsightly, wearing nothing but an undershirt and screaming in front of the stationery store.

"Idiot! You bastard!"

In his hand was a half-empty bottle of liquor.

Normally this would be considered a bother to the store's operations, but this man was actually the owner of the stationery store. He had been holding down the shop for thirty years now, but the large bookstore that popped up recently had driven down sales. He was a somewhat pitiful man, who was just barely managing to make a living. Of course, this doesn't give him a free pass to get drunk in midday to harass people passing by.

Normally his wife would keep him in check, but she happened to be out today. The locals, too used to his actions, didn't try to stop him or call the police. The man was completely drunk as he made a spectacle of himself on the road.

"Hm... this is a difficult situation." Shizu mumbled coolly as he slowly approached the drunken man. He spoke to him in a calm voice.

"Sir, making a scene like this may cause problems for others. You may also be in danger of heatstroke in this kind of weather."

However--



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"Whaddaya care, you greenhorn?! It ain't none of your business!" the drunkard retorted, spit flying from his mouth. He then began pestering Shizu, calling him a cheeky kid and threatening to call the school.

"Hm. If words are insufficient, punishment must follow..." Shizu mumbled, and the man roared, "What? You wanna fight?!".

"Get over here!" The man yelled and tried to drag Shizu into the alleyway beside his store. Shizu let himself be dragged in.

And once they were in the alley--

"Bring it, punk!"

The drunken man yelled, glaring at Shizu.

"..."

Shizu silently and solemnly looked at the drunkard.

Seeing that Shizu was unfazed by his threats, the man began shouting even more loudly, this time in gibberish. However--

"Sir... I cannot let you continue like this. I have no choice but to punish you."

The man got even angrier at Shizu's words, and began trying to provoke him.

"Then I shall show you true justice!"

Thud. The boston bag fell from Shizu's hand. The drunkard put up his guard.

Shizu clapped his hands and shouted, "Transform!"



GAKUEN KINO

And with that cry, Shizu quickly began to take off his clothes. His uniform jacket, his pants, his socks, his shirt.

"..."

As the drunken man watched in stunned silence, Shizu stripped off his underwear and stood naked. The back-alley strip. Amazing musculature.

"Oh..."

The drunken man's face paled as he watched this sight. The alcohol began to wear off. The moment the naked man took out an apple from the boston bag, placed it on his head, and put on a suspicious mask, the drunkard was overwhelmed by an indescribable fear.

"AAAAHHHHHHH!!! IT'S A PERVERT!"

The man screamed as he tossed away his bottle and ran from the apple- and mask-clad naked man. The sound of his running from the alleyway and into his store echoed through the street, along with the sound of the shutters closing.

The naked pervert, now alone, muttered to himself.

"Hm... Justice is very often misunderstood..."

Currently, he was a slightly melancholy-looking man in a mask. A naked man in a mask.

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing since this incident was solved without bloodshed." he mumbled as he continued his transformation. Of course, he was just putting on clothes.

Once he had finished changing, putting on a suspicious white uniform, a white mask, and a white cape, he had finally transformed into Samoyed Mask, a warrior of justice! (Note: There



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are multiple versions of him, such as 'a' or 'R', but he will just be known as Samoyed Mask. To be frank, they're all the same guy anyway.)

Having completed his transformation, Samoyed Mask smiled, his pearly-white teeth glinting. He then folded up his tossed uniform, put it in the boston bag, and hid the bag in his cape. Isn't it amazing how he can hide something so large in such a thin cape?

Samoyed Mask checked his katana with his left hand as he walked out into the street. He glanced at the stationery store, the shutters of which were closed.

Some time later.

The temperatures had gone down some and people began to venture out into the shopping district. And among the middle-aged ladies, grandmas, young housewives, and other such normal people was--

"He is a swordsman~!"

Samoyed Mask, walking and singing his theme song. He was still in his transformed state. Because of his outlandish appearance, other shoppers were doing their best to not make eye contact.

"He is a true swordsman~! Defending justice--hm?"

Samoyed Mask caught sight of something.

It was in the middle of the now-crowded shopping district, in front of the lamppost with the warning, "Beware of perverts!".

There was a little girl crying in front of the lamppost.



GAKUEN KINO

She was wearing a blue one-piece dress. Her long hair went down all the way to her back, and she had stick-thin arms and legs. Perhaps she was about eight years old? The girl was sniffling, leaning against the lamppost with her head bowed. Her tears glistened in the sunlight.

"Hm..."

Samoyed Mask stopped singing. He looked to his right. He then looked to his left. There were many people passing by, but none of them would reach out a hand to this crying girl. It was as if they were treating the girl just like Samoyed Mask--walking away briskly, ignoring her presence.

"The world's turning into a cold place." Samoyed Mask mumbled like an old man, and walked up to the girl. He then crouched down in front of the girl, who was wiping away tears with the back of her hand.

"Hello there, little miss. Why the long face?"

Hearing these gentlemanly words, the girl froze. She slowly lifted her head. She was a pretty girl with a very cute face.

Samoyed Mask spoke to her softly.

"Don't worry. I'm a warrior of justice. I'm most definitely not a construction mogul."

Really? The girl cocked her head, face covered in tears and snot.

"You're crying... What is it? I'll do whatever I can to help, so don't worry."

Samoyed Mask was very kind. The girl stopped crying and hesitantly spoke to Samoyed Mask in a very cute voice.



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"Are you... talking to me...?"

Samoyed Mask nodded, smiling.

"Of course. My name is Samoyed Mask. I am a true warrior of justice who loves justice above all else. I am a knight among knights who looks better than anyone in pristine white. And what about you, young miss? What's your name?"

A little girl and a pervert in a mask. This was the kind of combination that would have most people calling the police, but the passersby did nothing but glance at Samoyed Mask and walk away quickly.

The girl smiled beautifully at Samoyed Mask's question.

"Chika! My name's Chika!"

"Chika? 'Knowledge of flowers', huh? What a lovely name¹⁸."
Samoyed Mask said gently, like a nice guy. Is it just me, or does it sound really creepy coming from this guy? Justmehuh?OkayIgetit

"In any case, why are you crying, Chika? If you're lost, I will do my best as a warrior of justice to get you back to your mom and dad. I could take you to the police station."

When Samoyed Mask, who looked like he'd be arrested on the spot at a police station, said this, the girl shook her head.

"No! I'm not the one who's lost!"

"Huh?"

¹⁸ "Chika" is written with the kanji 知花.



GAKUEN KINO

"It's my dog!" The girl said. Her tears had stopped, and her face was completely clean. She wasn't even sweating, either.

The girl resolutely explained that her pet dog had disappeared without a trace while she had left the house for a bit.

"I see... it is true that one gets terribly lonely when a beloved dog disappears somewhere. But--" Samoyed Mask put emphasis on his next words. "That doesn't mean that your dog's abandoned you, Chika. What's the doggy's name?"

"Reagan'. He's a brown daschund. He's got a red collar and a metal tag with his name and our address."

"Reagan, is it? What a strong name. He probably lost his way while he went outside. I'm sure he's doing his best to find you right now."

"Then will you help me find him? Will you help me find Reagan?"

Samoyed Mask looked at the girl who was staring straight into his eyes behind the mask.

And he slowly nodded.

"All right. Let's look for him together! But remember, I am not a computer."

"?"

The girl cocked her head again.

"First, let's ask the people in this area!"

Samoyed Mask stood up and held out his right hand to the girl.

"But... no one ever answers me when I ask them..."



VOLUME 02

"Don't worry. I'll ask them for you."

The girl tentatively reached out to Samoyed Mask. Her hand made contact with Samoyed Mask's outstretched hand.

"Oh..."

The girl smiled happily and took his large hand in her small hand.

"Let's go!"

"Let's be off! I'm not wet concrete, either."

Samoyed Mask and the little girl then began grabbing people off the street to ask about Reagan.

The girl was very shy, so it was up to Samoyed Mask to ask, "Excuse me", and ask if someone had seen Reagan.

While people were surprised by Samoyed Mask's appearance, they would tell him that they didn't know or apologize for being unable to help.

He had asked about a hundred people in the shopping district, but no one knew anything about Reagan's whereabouts. As time passed, the sun began to disappear into the west. It would almost be time for the girl to go home.

"This is problematic..."

Not even the great Samoyed Mask could do something about this. Even still--

"Reagan..."



GAKUEN KINO

He could not bring himself to just leave this girl, who was holding his hand and on the verge of tears.

Samoyed Mask asked a passing young man, a university student, despite not having much hope. "Have you seen a dog that looks like this?"

"Oh! Oh....! I did! I've seen that dog!" The student answered.

"I saw him at the hill behind the park over there. I saw the collar and thought it might belong to someone, so I tried to catch him. But he ran away. The colour of the collar and the breed are all the same. He must be the one you're talking about."

"Thank you! The hill behind the park, right? Let's go!"

Samoyed Mask thanked the student and ran, holding the little girl's hand. The park was a little ways away. The hill was a forested area.

As he watched Samoyed Mask run off with his cape aflutter, the student mumbled, "What a weird outfit."

He then added,

"But it's already been three years since I saw that dog..."

"Reagan! Reagan!"

The girl's cries echoed through the forest.

The skies were reddening, and the light that filtered in through the leaves was growing dim. Samoyed Mask continued to search for Reagan, holding the girl's hand.

"Reagan! Where are you?"



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The girl's anguished cries ran out through the woods. Samoyed Mask had just begun to think that he should suggest to her that they search tomorrow.

Woof!

It was the sound of a dog barking.

"Reagan!" The girl yelled.

Shocked, Samoyed Mask looked down. In front of the girl was a dog wearing a bright red collar with a metal tag, wagging his tail. He was identical to Chika's description.

"Reagan!"

Chika let go of Samoyed Mask's hand. She kneeled on the tall grass and took Reagan in her arms.

"Reagan! Reagan! I'm so glad you're all right!"

The dog licked the girl's face as she held him in a hug.

"Don't leave like that ever again, okay!"

Woof!

Reagan barked quickly as he energetically wagged his tail.

"I'm glad for you, Chika. Reagan."

Samoyed Mask kneeled in front of Chika and held out his right hand, still warm with the pressure of her grip. Reagan sniffed his hand and licked his fingertips.

"Haha, that tickles." Samoyed Mask laughed. The girl looked at him, crying tears of joy.



GAKUEN KINO

"Thank you! Thank you so much!"

"Not a problem. All in a day's work for a warrior of justice."

"Thank you..."

A single tear ran down the girl's face as she stood up, holding the dog in her arms.

"What a relief. Let's go home with Reagan now. I'm sure your mom and dad are worried about you, just like you were worried about Reagan." Samoyed Mask suggested.

The girl smiled.

"Thanks so much, big brother in the weird outfit."

"You're very welcome. By the way, I'm not a lotus root."

"I have to go now."

"Yes. Now, let me take you home. It's dangerous in the dark. These days, there are some terrible criminals that go after children."

"Thanks, but it's okay. This is goodbye."

Woof! Reagan barked.

"Huh?"

Samoyed Mask cocked his head in confusion. Just as he was about to tell her, "I can't leave you here in the forest. Let me at least take you to the shopping district, where there are a lot of people"--

Chika and Reagan disappeared.



VOLUME 02

It was in an instant. The girl holding the dog disappeared into blue particles of light, leaving not even an afterimage.

"Huh?"

Samoyed Mask was alone in this dark forest.

He slowly got up and looked to his right. He looked to his left. He looked behind him. He looked above him.

The girl and the dog were nowhere to be found.

"Chika? Reagan?"

No matter how many times he called out, there was no answer.

As Samoyed Mask took a light half-step forward--

Ting.

He heard a very, very small metallic sound. He could only hear this noise because his powers had been heightened when he transformed into Samoyed Mask.

"Hm...?"

Samoyed Mask moved his foot and kneeled over the spot where the girl had been standing with the dog. He crouched down and looked into the darkness.

And he found something.

A red collar, faded and worn with age.

A dirt-covered metal tag.

And--



GAKUEN KINO

"..."

The bones of an animal.

A yellowed set of animal bones were scattered around, half-buried in the ground.

Samoyed Mask slowly brought the collar to eye-level. Several tiny bones scattered over the ground.

Engraved on the metal tag were the words "Reagan - Chika's Lovely Dog.".

And a nearby address.

Samoyed Mask tightly grasped the cold name tag.

That night.

A strange visitor made his way to a certain house.

A handsome student in a white standing-collar uniform, with a katana strapped to his side, had visited out of the blue.

The student spoke to the couple who owned this place.

"I'm very sorry for the sudden intrusion. I'm a friend of Chika. May I say see her?"

They might not have let him in at all if he hadn't handed them an old dog collar.

Shizu, having been invited into the house, sat on his knees, placed his katana on the floor beside him, and--



VOLUME 02

"We meet again."

He bowed deeply towards Chika.

The girl in the black picture frame was smiling brightly, wearing a blue one-piece dress.

After burning the incense, Shizu told the couple that he had spoken to Chika before when she was out walking the dog. He then added:

"This evening, I happened to come by Reagan's collar and remains. I gave him a proper burial, and came to visit because I thought it only right to at least return his collar."

The couple nodded sadly, and bowed in thanks many times over. They placed the collar beside her photo.

Shizu was told by the parents that Chika had died of an illness three years earlier.

He was also told that Reagan ran away from home to find the hospitalized Chika and never returned.

And that Chika worried for Reagan until her death.

As Shizu walked through the dark, deserted shopping district, he stopped in front of a certain lamppost.

"..."

There was no one there anymore.

Shizu smiled and mumbled,

"Justice is often very misunderstood."



GAKUEN KINO

He then disappeared into the street.

The lamppost with the warning, "Beware of perverts!" watched him as he walked away.

End.